ERIC STOKES
EDITED BY C. A. BAYLY

THE PEASANT ARMED

The Indian Rebellion of 1857

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Eric Stokes, who died in 1981, was the foremost British historian of India of his generation, and an influential writer on the problems of colonial empires. This book represents a substantial part of what would have been his definitive statement on the social origins of the Indian Mutiny-rebellion of 1857. It contains a detailed analysis of the various rural groups which took part in the revolt or fought on the British side, and extends the investigation of the preconditions for rebellion which Professor Stokes had initiated in many scholarly articles. He pays particular attention to the old proprietary groups of Brahmins and Rajputs, scattered throughout rural north India, who provided the seed-bed of resistance to the British, and also to the semi-nomadic cattle-keeping communities which were heavily involved in dissidence.

The book also provides a vigorous account of the course of the Mutiny, which throws light on the reasons for the British victory and the failure of the mutineers to consolidate their revolt. Overall, it makes a considerable contribution to Indian social history, colonial history, and military history.

The late Eric Stokes was Smuts Professor of Commonwealth History, Cambridge University.

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Jacket illustration: The Kotwal of Police at Lucknow and his Assistants. From *Narrative of the Indian Revolt* (London 1858)

THE PEASANT ARMED

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

ERIC STOKES's original scheme for *The Peasant Armed* included three chapters for which no draft material exists. These were to be studies of the revolt in 'the Lower Doab' (i.e. Fatehpur and Allahabad districts), 'Oudh and the eastern districts' (i.e. the tracts covered by the Chief Commissioner of Oudh, the Commissioner of Benares and Western Bihar in the later nineteenth century), and central India. His detailed treatment of the social origins of the revolt would therefore have extended to all regions where mutiny was complemented by civil rebellion in 1857. Stokes does not appear to have projected any separate treatment of regions where the military alone revolted, such as a number of Punjab stations, or areas where there was a good deal of élite or popular discontent which did not break into open rebellion, as in Hyderabad or parts of the Maratha territories. The work would also have culminated with a lengthy essay on colonial revolt in general, but, sadly, he had not begun to write the conclusion at the time of his death in 1981. The direction of Stokes's thought on the various regions can be partially inferred from *The Peasant and the Raj* (Cambridge, 1978). The introduction to this work and chapter 5—on 'traditional resistance movements'—deal briefly with Oudh and the Lower Doab, while chapter 11 has contextual material for central India. In addition, Stokes supervised nearly fifty undergraduate seminar papers for a Cambridge special subject on the rebellion in the late 1960s. These give further indications of his ideas for the missing chapters and I have suggested how he might have proceeded in my concluding note to this volume.

The lack of Eric Stokes's own conclusions is, nevertheless, a severe problem. I have tried to fill the gap by including here a seminar paper for the South Asian Institute of Heidelberg University completed in 1978 and entitled 'The Roots of Peasant Violence in the 1857 Rebellion'. In no way can this stand as a conclusion. But it does relate to one of the major issues with which he grappled, the relation between élite and mass protest, besides dealing with an area of the north Indian plains (the middle and lower Doab) not covered in the extant chapters.

A further difficulty is that chapter 3 of *The Peasant Armed* is unfinished. It was to be a general treatment of the north Indian agrarian economy and the British Raj, bringing up to date some of the material presented in chapter 2 of *The Peasant and the Raj* ('The first century of British colonial rule in India') and his chapter in the *Cambridge Economic History of India* (Cambridge, 1982). The chapter would presumably have gone on to deal with the lower strata of the peasantry, agricultural labourers, and possibly townsmen and artisans. Parts of this chapter have proved exceptionally difficult to reconstruct as they were in very rough draft. But it seemed essential to include them, as Eric Stokes's understanding of the society of the old peasant élite of north India—the Rajput and Brahmin village-controllers—is central to his whole analysis of the revolt.

Finally, it should be mentioned that nearly half of the references and footnotes were incomplete and impossible to trace in manuscript notes. Stokes was a very careful scholar and the quotations are almost certainly correct. But it has proved impossible to track their source down in several instances. Rather than omit all reference material in such cases, I have included as much as can be recovered so that any future research worker will at least know where to start looking.

Inevitably *The Peasant Armed* is an unbalanced book. The connection between the military mutiny, so interestingly treated in the first two chapters, and the detailed social analysis which exists thereafter is implicit rather than explicit. This makes the book difficult for the non-specialist to follow. But the interest and sophistication of this work made its publication imperative, even in an incomplete form.

St Catharine's College, Cambridge
July 1985

C. A. BAYLY

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ABBREVIATIONS

C.-in-C.	Commander-in-Chief
DG	District Gazetteer
Gaz.	E. T. Atkinson (ed.), *Statistical Accounts of the North-Western Provinces*, Allahabad, 1874–84
G.-G. in C	Governor-General in Council
G of I	Government of India
FSUP	S. A. Rizvi and M. I. Bhargava (eds.), *Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh*, 6 vols., Lucknow, 1957–61.
HM	Her Majesty's . . .
IESHR	*Indian Economic and Social History Review*
IOL	India Office Library and Records, London
LC	Light Cavalry
Lt.-Gov.	Lieutenant-Governor
Milit. Progs.	Military Proceedings
NE	*Narrative of Events Regarding the Mutiny in 1857–58 and the Restoration of Authority*, Calcutta, 1881
NI	Native Infantry
NWP	North-Western Provinces
PGR	*Punjab Government Records: Mutiny Records—Correspondence*, vol. vii, Lahore, 1911
Pol. Progs.	Political Proceedings
PP	Parliamentary Papers
Rev. Progs.	Revenue Proceedings
SR	District Settlement Report
TNN	C. T. Metcalfe (ed.), *Two Native Narratives of the Mutiny of Delhi*, Westminster, 1898
UP	United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (later Uttar Pradesh)

SELECT GLOSSARY OF INDIAN WORDS

badmash: Bandit, bad character.
bangar: Upland, as distinct from *khadir* or riverain land.
bania: Hindu trader, often also a moneylender.
barkandaze: A matchlockman, watchman, guard or escort.
bhaiachara: Lit. custom of the brotherhood. Under British revenue law denoted a form of tenure in which the land-revenue demand was apportioned among the village proprietors on some principle other than ancestral shares.
bigha: Land measure standardized by the British at 5/8ths of an acre.
biswa: Lit. a twentieth. A twentieth share of a village or estate.
biswadar: A coparcener. In *taluqdari* estates the term used under British revenue law in NW Provinces for a village sub-proprietor.
borah: Member of a Gujarati trading and banking caste. Used loosely to denote village banker.
Chamar: Member of a caste traditionally associated with tanning hides and menial labour tasks.
Chattri: Term commonly used in eastern UP to denote member of a Rajput caste.
chaudhuri: Local headman or petty notable.
chaukidar: A watchman.
chaurasi: A tract containing nominally eighty-four villages usually controlled by one particular dominant clan.
des: Country, local district, homeland.
dharra (*dhar*): Faction.
duffadar: Commandant of a body of horse, or party of police.
fatwa: Adjudication on matter of law or custom by a Muslim jurist.
ghazi: Muslim holy warrior, engaged in *jihad* (q.v.).
got (*gotra*): Exogamous kin group or clan.
Gujar: A semi-nomadic, semi-agricultural caste of western UP.
havildar: Indian non-commissioned officer.
huzur: Lit. pertaining to authority. Used often to denote chief or leading, as the chief pargana of a district in which the capital is situated.
jagir: The assignment to a person of the State revenue due from a specified area or estate.
jagirdar: The holder of a *jagir*.
Jat: A standard agricultural caste of western UP.

jihad: Muslim holy war.
karinda: An agent or manager.
khadir: Low or alluvial lands; cf. *bangar.*
khap: Area held or controlled by a clan.
kotwal: Chief police officer of town or city.
lakh: One hundred thousand.
lambardar: One who has a number on the revenue roll. Hence a person who pays land revenue on behalf of a number of small proprietors. One of a number of village headmen.
mahajan: A village or small town banker.
mahal: An estate or proprietary holding as defined in the revenue accounts. In upper India it often coincided originally with *mauza*, or lands pertaining to a single village.
malguzar: Person engaging for land revenue.
Mali: The gardener caste.
malik: Lit. master, lord. Term used to describe a proprietor in a village; cf. *pattidar.*
malikana: Under British revenue law the allowance paid to a proprietor temporarily excluded from the revenue engagement.
maulavi (*maulawi*): A Muslim scholar or divine.
maund: An Indian measure of weight, about eighty-two pounds.
mauza: A village and its land as defined in the revenue survey.
muafi: Grant of land free of revenue.
mukarari: Tract of land or fiscal lordship held at a fixed revenue payment.
munserim: A subordinate judicial official.
munsif: An Indian civil judge of small causes.
muqaddam: One of the managers of a village proprietary body.
nankar: Lit. subsistence. An assignment of revenue or land made as a reward for undertaking revenue-management rights or as compensation for being deprived of them.
nazim: Governor of a province or vicegerent.
pal: A dike or dam.
pargana: A revenue subdivision of a *tahsil.* A group of mutually connected villages.
patwar: The village revenue record keeper.
patti: Division or share.
pattidar: One who holds land on which the payment of the revenue demand is apportioned by the proprietary kin group according to ancestral shares.
pattidari: System of tenure in which the land is farmed in severalty but in which the revenue demand on the estate is apportioned by the kin group on ancestral shares.
pucca: Lit. ripe, cooked. Substantial, permanent, well-finished.

qasbah: A small town, often a centre of Muslim gentry.
qazi: A Muslim judge in matters of Muslim law.
rais: A notable, a man of position.
raj: Kingdom, principality. Used loosely to denote the British Indian Empire.
Rangar: A nomadic herdsman caste of western UP and Haryana.
reh: Saline efflorescence.
risala: A troop of horse.
risaldar: Indian officer commanding a troop of horse.
ryot: Cultivator or farmer, as distinct from labourer.
ryotwar: A system of land revenue assessment based upon the productivity of the fields of individual cultivators, common in western and southern India.
sepoy: Indian private soldier of the East India Company.
sir: Personal or home farm; land under owner cultivation.
sowar: An armed horseman or cavalryman.
subedar: Governor of a province; in the Indian Army a native captain.
tahsil: Administrative subdivision of a district (N. India).
tahsildar: Indian officer in charge of a *tahsil.*
tahsili: Administrative headquarters of a *tahsil.*
taluq: Lit. dependency, connection. (1) Fiscal lordship or estate, in which the holder is responsible for the revenue collection from a number of dependent villages (N. India). (2) A group of villages held in mutual dependence by lineage ties among the proprietary bodies. (3) Administrative subdivision of a district (W. and S. India); cf. *tahsil.*
taluqdar: Holder of a *taluk*. Under British revenue law in NW Provinces a superior proprietor drawing a fixed percentage on revenue payments made by village sub-proprietors or *biswadars.* In Oudh a full proprietor of a number of villages; cf. *zamindar* in Bengal.
tappa: Cluster of villages acknowledging the supremacy of one among them, and often connected by lineage ties. Used more frequently in West UP and Haryana; cf. *taluk* in East UP.
thakur: Lit. lord, master. Usually denotes Rajput landholder (N. India).
thana: A police station, or area under jurisdiction of a local police station.
thanadar: Chief police officer of a *thana.*
ulama (singular *alim*): Learned Muslim jurists.
Wahhabi: A Muslim purist sect originating in Saudi Arabia; this term was inaccurately applied to members of the Tarikh-i-Muhamadiyya who sought to purify Islam in India and were suspected of hostility to British rule.
zail or *zila*: Subdivision of a *tahsil* in the former Punjab province.
zamindar: Lit. landholder. Under British law designated a person recognized as possessing the proprietary right.

zamindari: An estate held in full proprietary right (N. India). Used adjectively to describe system of land-revenue settlement in which notables responsible for collection from a considerable number of villages were recognized as proprietors of such 'estates' (Bengal).

ziladar: Officer in charge of a *zail.*

INTRODUCTION

In the middle decades of the nineteenth century a wave of political earthquakes shook the Eurasian land mass. But the widely separated upheavals, ranging from the 1848 revolutions in Europe, to the Mutiny Rebellion in India, and the Taiping and Nien rebellions in China, had little in common except the experience of failure. They were all movements *sans issue*, leaving no trace except a lasting fear of violence from below. Even so, they stand out as the great tide-marks of the past, recording those periodic moments when the normally featureless flow of the historical process is drawn into a single towering wave and when beneath the surface spindrift the observer is allowed a penetrating glimpse into the depths beneath. The folk memory is not deceived in obliterating all but these moments as truly historic. Popular cognizance of the modern history of the Indian subcontinent is limited appropriately to three episodes dignified by the names of 'Clive', 'the Mutiny', and 'Gandhi'. For these unerringly epitomize its three decisive historical phases—the colonial onset, the crisis of consolidation, and the colonial defeat and withdrawal.

The Great Rebellion of 1857 impresses more by its geographical extent than by the scale of its violence. The storming of Delhi and the relief of Lucknow seem closer to the personal style of medieval warfare than the anonymous slaughter of the Somme and Stalingrad, Hiroshima and Vietnam. Such a period-piece still holds Western attention because of the intimate, human scale on which the action was conducted in contrast with the casual celluloid violence of our more recent experience. Popular works are still written on 'the Mutiny' seeking to recapture the picture-book world of sunlit heroes with which the later Victorian age peopled its imagination and named its streets and public houses. Havelock, Outram, Henry Lawrence, Colin Campbell, and Nicholson received a fitful apotheosis at the hands of the brewers and G. H. Henty alike, but among a certain class of writers they are still names that men will not willingly let die. Even the modern intellectual can find himself caught up in the Siege of Krishnapur. And properly so, if

the picture images of the imagination are to continue to fertilize the wastelands of professional historical analysis.

To India 1857 bequeathed a more living and enduring presence. The British Raj carefully preserved its memorials. The shell-pocked Kashmiri Gate at Delhi, where Nicholson stormed to victory and death with his avenging column, was left to point its moral. At Kanpur (Cawnpore) a weeping angel carved in marble by Marochetti was placed as a shrine over the well down which Nana's minions had cast the butchered remains of some two hundred British women and children, and in the stone surround was graven the simple scriptural epitaph: 'These are they who have come out of great tribulation'. At Lucknow the shattered ruins of the Residency were left unrepaired, and from the tower the Union Jack continued to be flown day and night, as through most of the siege, the one spot in the British Empire where the flag was not lowered at dusk. So long as the Raj endured, the living force of these symbols remained. For a system of foreign rule that stood increasingly on the defensive they performed the psychological function E. M. Forster attributed to the playing of the National Anthem in the Chandrapore Club:

> Conversation and billiards stopped, faces stiffened. It was the Anthem of the Army of Occupation. It reminded every member of the Club that he or she was British and in exile. It produced a little sentiment and a useful accession of will-power. The meagre tune, the curt series of demands on Jehovah, fused into a prayer unknown in England, and though they perceived neither Royalty nor Deity they did perceive something, they were strengthened to resist another day.

When the transfer of power approached in August 1947 and the dangers of massive communal violence loomed nearer, it might have been supposed that the mind of the GOC Eastern Command, Sir Francis Tuker, would have been fully absorbed by the problems of preserving public order. Yet not the least of his concerns was the fear that these venerated places might be desecrated. So that there should be no unseemly triumph, Tuker ordered a party of British troops to the Residency to remove the Union Jack secretly at night and demolish the flagstaff by an explosive charge at its base. Yet the assiduous cultivation of the mythology of the Mutiny ensured that at independence, along with the Viceroy's Bodyguard, the regimental mess silver, and the other impedimenta of empire, the

mythology should also be transferred into Indian and Pakistani hands. For 1857 had come to be regarded as the formative violence of their national history, the proof that colonialism had been withstood even unto blood. On Independence Day a huge crowd flocked to the Residency in Lucknow intent on raising the Indian flag in place of the white conqueror's which had flaunted itself defiantly over the city day and night for ninety years. But they were prevented by 'Dadhu' Pant, the grand old man of UP politics who had spent a lifetime in the anti-British struggle, and who now as prime minister of the State bade the crowds go home and leave in peace a spot sacred to the British dead.[1] So the little graveyard by the ruined church was left undisturbed, and the Residency buildings and grounds have been preserved as a memorial museum to commemorate what in Indian history books has become known as the First Freedom Struggle. Neill's obelisk and Henry Lawrence's plain flat gravestone remain in perfect condition; and the visitor may still experience the shock of recognition as he makes out the words known to every latter-day Victorian schoolboy: 'Here lies Henry Lawrence who tried to do his duty'. South of the city the Alambagh has fallen into total decay and decrepit flats have encroached on to what was a large open garden. But in their midst the railed enclosure of Havelock's grave is still kept neat and tended.

At Kanpur (Cawnpore) fifty miles to the south, the historical tradition is darker. The Sati Chaura Ghat with its Siva temple still bears the ominous title of Massacre Ghat, and the air seems loaded with menace. The site of the Well, however, has undergone the most striking transformation, evincing how deeply evocative this remained as a political symbol. From the shrine itself all Indians (except Christians) were debarred down to the day of Independence. Then the crowd could not be contained and the nose of the marble angel was damaged. To prevent further incidents, agreement was made with the European Well Committee to remove all traces of the memorial, which was then dismantled and re-erected in the churchyard of the memorial church by Wheeler's entrenchment in the cantonment. But long-harboured resentment proved too strong for the past thus to be quietly obliterated. Gazing in triumph on the site of the Well and its mass grave there now looks down a bronze

[1] The story is told in Francis Tuker, *While Memory Serves* (London, 1950), p. 417.

effigy of Tantia Topi, the general of the Nana Sahib.[2] It is curious that the power of symbols should have produced such a singularly tasteless and vicious reprisal against the hapless dead, while the far more numerous victims of British atrocities elsewhere should have gone without a memorial. But the affair serves to show that the ashes of the conflict are not entirely without heat and are still capable here and there of being fanned into life. Perhaps for the British since the liquidation of empire their emotive power has departed almost clean away, but for India and Pakistan they remain an essential part of their national legends.

That the past should remain charged with emotion is the precondition of the historian's activity, but such emotion almost imprisons him within the framework of its own lines of interpretation. The nature of the 1857 uprising aroused fierce controversy from the outset. The official British explanation was that the Bengal Native Army alone had mutinied and that any civil disturbances were the natural by-products of the breakdown of law and order. Yet as early as July 1857, Disraeli flung the question across the Commons whether the British were not standing in the presence of a national revolt.[3] In India the controversy bit deep among the European community, concerned more to apportion blame than make disinterested enquiry. Civilian officials at once indicted the army authorities for the long-standing laxity, indiscipline, and inefficiency that had at length made every regiment of the Bengal army mutinous or untrustworthy. They shut from their minds the possibility that in the model civil administration of the North-Western Provinces any deep-seated discontent could have been at work. Cooped up in Agra, with British rule crumbling away all around the provincial capital, William Muir quickly convinced himself that 'the character of the affair is that of a Military mutiny—a struggle between the Government and its Soldiers, not between the Government and the People'.[4]

The military and the vociferous European mercantile community at Calcutta had no patience for such views, placing the blame squarely on Canning, the Governor-General, and his officials for

[2] A. S. Mishra, *Nana Saheb Peshwa and the Fight for Freedom* (Lucknow, 1961), 598, 507–17.

[3] *Hansard Parliamentary Debates, 3rd Series*, vol. 147, 27 July 1857, pp. 440–72, cited in A. T. Embree (ed.), *1857 in India* (Boston, 1963), pp. 4–12.

[4] W. Muir, *Records of the Intelligence Department of the Government of the N.W. Provinces of India during the Mutiny of 1857* (London, 1902), i. 31, 39.

their pusillanimous handling of the crisis and for their refusal to recognize the fact that they had a formidable civil rebellion on their hands. Colonel G. B. Malleson—later to complete J. W. Kaye's great *History of the Sepoy War*—was the anonymous spokesman of this school of vituperative criticism:

> The crisis came: At first, apparently, a mere military mutiny, it speedily changed its character, and became a national insurrection. The Rajpoot villages in Behar, those in the districts of Benares, Azimgurh [Azamgarh], Goruckpore [Gorakhpur], in the entire Doab, comprising the divisions of Allahabad, Cawnpore, Meerut and Agra, in the provinces of Rohilcund [Rohilkhand] and Oudh [Awadh], shook off our rule and declared against us. But the men who administered the affairs of India refused to admit the existence of events which were clear to all around them; they persisted in governing as though there were no disorder in the civil districts, and feigned to believe that the cultivators of the soil—the class from which the sepoys are selected were, to a man, in our favour.[5]

Upon this foundation the corpus of historiographical tradition was constructed. J. W. Kaye, the chief historian of the Mutiny, was in no doubt that the explosion came from deep within the depths of civil society and that British policy had steadily alienated the aristocracy and the priesthood while failing to reconcile the peasant proprietary classes. But he did not live to deliver a rounded and final judgement, and the completion of his great *History* fell to Malleson, a man of smaller mind. Primarily concerned to flay Canning and his advisers for want of prompt resolution and ferocity and to applaud British military heroes in fulsome rhetoric, Malleson neglected to follow up Kaye's analysis of the roots of civil rebellion.[6] But later in his one-volume recension of 1891 he did set out the essential elements of what has become known as the conspiracy theory. Sufficient evidence existed, Malleson claimed, to demonstrate that the 1857 outbreak occurred as a result of premeditated design at a level of leadership outside and above that of the sepoy regiments. The Maulavi of Faizabad, the Nana Sahib, and the Rani of Jhansi, had entered into a plot which misfired only in its actual timing.[7] There were other contemporaries prepared to

[5] G. B. Malleson, *The Mutiny of the Bengal Army* (known as the 'Red Pamphlet'), (London, 1858), p. 63.

[6] Cf. G. B. Malleson, *History of the Indian Mutiny* (London, 1878–80), i, which was intended to displace vol. iii of Sir John W. Kaye's *A History of the Sepoy War in India* (London, 1867).

[7] G. B. Malleson, *The Indian Mutiny of 1857* (London, 1891).

subscribe to the thesis of preconcerted rebellion, like J. B. Norton and Alexander Duff, but the general tendency of British writing in the nineteenth century was to follow Kaye who in his carefully chosen title *History of the Sepoy War* showed where he believed the locus of historical initiative was to be found. T. Rice Holmes, whose *History of the Indian Mutiny* was first published in 1883 and reached a fifth edition by 1898, struck the most representative note. For him the civil rebellion was a secondary phenomenon, the chance upsurge of unruly and discontented elements unexpectedly provided with an outlet, 'just as a general mutiny of the London police would be followed by a violent outburst of crime on the part of the London thieves and roughs, so the talukdars, the dispossessed land-holders, the Gujars, and the budmashees [criminals] of India . . . welcomed the first signal of governmental weakness as a signal for gratifying their selfish instincts'.[8]

It was Malleson, however, who had prepared the way for the full-blooded nationalist interpretation of V. D. Savarkar. *The Indian War of Independence of 1857* was published in London in 1909 under the anonymous authorship of 'An Indian Nationalist'; but so powerful was Savarkar's writing that the book remained banned in India almost to the end of British rule. It was, of course, written as a tract for the times.

These main lines of interpretation were all laid down before the events of 1857 came under the scrutiny of professional academic historians. By the time this occurred serious controversy was largely confined to Indians and Pakistanis. Given the official pressure to incorporate 1857 into the national legend it is remarkable how detached was the bulk of the writing that appeared in 1957 to commemorate the centenary. The officially sponsored work of S. N. Sen seems remarkably judicious and mild in tone, and departs little from the lines of Kaye's interpretation. Although at the end of this ably written book Sen ventured the generalization that 'what began as a fight for religion ended as a war for independence', he was clear that there was no prior conspiracy and no question of a nationalist uprising except in the limited sense of local patriotism in Oudh.[9] Small wonder that the Vice-President of India at the time, Dr S. Radhakrishnan, was moved to contribute a foreword to the

[8] T. R. Holmes, *History of the Indian Mutiny* (5th edn., London, 1898), p. 560.
[9] S. N. Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven* (Publication Division, Ministry of Information Broadcasting, Government of India, Calcutta, 1957), ch. 11.

far more radical exposition of S. B. Chaudhuri, who in his *Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutinies* (1957) assembled every scrap of written evidence to demonstrate that 1857 was a 'rising of the people'. But Chaudhuri found himself immediately challenged by a historian who relished vigorous controversy and was not afraid to voice unpopular ideas. Smarting from attempts to impose an official line on his own *History of the Freedom Movement*, R. C. Majumdar poured scorn on the attempt to inflate the 1857 struggle into a holy war for national self-determination. He chose instead to resurrect Holmes's notion that civil disturbance was merely the by-product of a political vacuum caused by the military mutiny and was largely self-seeking in character.[10]

There was a third line of interpretation which appeared already in 1857 and which was taken up by later historians. British officials serving in western districts of the North-Western Provinces (that is, in the Doab above Agra, in the Delhi region, and in Rohilkhand) were convinced that while the mass of the population felt contentment with British rule, they had been worked upon by elements of the old Muslim élite, who had conspired to ferment political rebellion. (Sir) William Muir, it will be recalled, had taken this view, and it commanded support from a still younger civilian later to achieve distinction, Alfred Lyall, who served in the Bulandshahr district. 'The whole insurrection is a great Mohomedan conspiracy', wrote the young Lyall to his father in August 1857, 'and the sepoys are merely the tools of the Mussulmans.'[11] The Commissioner of the Meerut Division, comprising the whole of the upper Doab, recorded the same view as to the nature of the disturbances among the civil population. In his official narrative, he wrote of 'the happily, unavailing endeavours of the Mahomedan leaders to make the mass of the population join them, and the bitter complaints of the Hindoo mutineers that they have been deeply deceived:- all these indicate that, though a spirit of mutiny may have prepared the native army, the real movers were Mahomedans'.[12] The Magistrate of Saharanpur, R. Spankie, had little illusion concerning the attachment of the people. 'The people of this district, and in all others in the country I suppose, have no sympathy with Government, British

[10] R. C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857* (Calcutta, 1957).
[11] A. C. Lyall to his father, 30 Aug. 1857; Lyall Papers, MSS Eur. F 132, LC/3.
[12] *Narrative of Events Regarding the Mutiny in India of 1857–58 and the Restoration of Authority*, i. 285, para. 430. (Hereafter NE.)

or Native. Separate castes and communities have separate ends and desires to attain, and the weakness of Government is their strength.' That the agricultural communities should have resorted to violence could be put down to motives of plunder, and their attacks on Government offices and the burning of records was the crowning result of a determination to have no obligations to anyone. But 'the common brotherhood of all Mahomedans is a very different matter, and I think it would be impossible to deny that they were in heart and soul against us'.[13] Local British officers concerned with neighbouring Rohilkhand subscribed, with one notable exception, to a similar Islamic theory of the rebellion. If these were the views of local officers, concerning disturbances in the districts, they needed no convincing that the larger framework of rebellion was Muslim. The Deputy Judge Advocate General at the trial of Bahadur Shah seized upon every scrap of possible evidence to bolster the charge that the King had been at the centre of a deep-laid plot to restore the old Mughal regime at Delhi.[14] In Awadh the attempt to restore the deposed Muslim dynasty clearly formed the basis of rebel organization at Lucknow. It was in the western region of the North-Western Provinces where the old Muslim élite clustered thickest that the theory of Muslim rebellion fixed itself most deeply, but the cry was taken up far to the east because of events in the city of Patna, later the capital of Bihar. Here the controversial figure of Commissioner Taylor and his precipitate arrest of the 'Wahhabi' (Islamic revivalist) leaders fanned suspicion into flame. When he was disowned by the Bengal Government, the Calcutta European community fiercely championed his cause, as the next Commissioner, Samuells, was made aware when he ventured to bring with him on his staff a leading Indian Muslim lawyer. 'The whole of the Calcutta press, apparently without exception, have taken up the idea that this is a Mahomedan rebellion, not merely in the sense that the sepoys were worked upon by individual Mahomedans, which may or may not be true, but that the entire Mahomedan community is disaffected and merely waits its opportunity to rise and throw off the British yoke.'[15]

[13] *Idem*, p. 477, paras. 8, 9.

[14] PP 1858 (1), xviii, pp. 243–63, esp. 245, 257, 263. That Muslims were the instigators and Hindus their dupes was a view held by J. Cave-Browne, *The Punjab and Delhi in 1857* (Edinburgh, 1861), ii. 273, and Lord Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India* (London, 1905), p. 211; see T. Khaldun in P. C. Joshi (ed.), *Rebellion—1857. A Symposium* (Delhi, 1957), pp. 26–7.

[15] Commissioner of Patna to Govt. of Bengal, 6 Oct. 1857, para. 11; PP 1857–8,

In the post-Mutiny years so strong appeared British official belief in Muslim responsibility for the revolt that Sayyid Ahmad Khan sought to rescue his co-religionists from the stigma of general disloyalty by setting out in his pamphlet *Who were the Loyal Mussulmanns?* the numerous instances of collaboration. But when by the twentieth century the tide of Muslim nationalism had turned in a different direction, it was to be expected that Muslim responsibility for 1857 would be proudly proclaimed. The ruling circles of Pakistan have been as anxious as those in India to annex 1857 to the story of their freedom struggle, and Muslim ideologues like I. H. Qureshi and Syed Moinul Haq have supplied the need of the hour.[16]

All three interpretations that have so far been considered were generated and have been sustained by group interest and political passion. The same is true, although the connection is weaker and less obvious, of the attempt to read the events of 1857 as a peasant revolt. Any interpretation that rests on the notion of a general popular upheaval has to demonstrate that the revolt of the sepoy army and its struggle to hold a few key towns was but part of the story, and that in the countryside—at least in certain areas—the population rose *en masse*. Such a theory requires to show that this was more than the action of disaffected rural magnates and gentry and that the peasant masses themselves were in the forefront of rebellion. Here we touch upon a deeper level than the vague disturbance of the popular mind by fears for religion and caste, springing from British interference with customs like widow burning and widow remarriage or British enforcement of the intermingling of castes through common messing in gaols and the common carriage of passengers by the railway. What is in question is the impact of western legal forms and principles on the distribution of rights to the land. Kaye had much to say on the Policy of the 'Dead Level' and how the attempt of the administration of the North-Western Provinces to establish a peasant proprietary meant treating the magnate and gentry classes with a rough hand. Whilst he was more

xliv, pt. 3, p. 345. For Tayler's theory of a Muslim conspiracy, see ibid., pt. 2, pp. 10, 17.

[16] Cf. I. H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent (610–1947)* (The Hague, 1962), p. 261; also *Ulema in Politics* (London, 1963), and Syed Moinul Haq, *The Great Revolution of 1857* (Pakistan Historical Society, Karachi, 1968).

concerned with the alienation of the upper classes, he also saw that what he chose to speak of as the peasant yeomanry had also been profoundly affected.

It is usual to speak of the most revolutionary innovation introduced by the British as the institution of private property rights in land, the absence of which for nineteenth-century sociological thought marked off Asian from Western society. By private property rights was understood a distinct, individual recorded title, enforceable by a modern judicial system and freely transferable by sale or mortgage. Such a system had been the inevitable concomitant of the colonial 'legal-rational' bureaucracy and of the British land revenue administration which defined proprietary right for the purposes of the payment of the land tax, the sinews of the British Raj. Ideologically the British were committed to free trade in land. Adam Smith had voiced their instinct in saying that the magic of property turned sand into gold, and their hopes of regenerating Indian agriculture lay in the release of individual energy and enterprise implicit in a free economy. But there were more near-sighted reasons for unrestricted transferability of title. The security of the revenue was always the first administrative priority, and in an impersonal system of land taxation it was deemed essential that when a landholder defaulted on his dues to the state an automatic legal process should attach his holding and if necessary transfer it by sale to a new solvent holder. Moreover in the North-Western Provinces the British administrators found themselves up against the hard fact that even when they had set aside overlord claims and settled directly for the land revenue with village landholders, they were still dealing with classes priding themselves on their martial or sacred status and disdaining to engage directly in agriculture.

Throughout the North-Western Provinces and Oudh the vast bulk of the village landholders were drawn from the putative Rajput and Brahmin castes who were loath to hold the plough. Their often slovenly and indifferent exploitation of the soil contrasted sharply with that of the true agricultural castes like Jats and Kurmis who were prominent in a tenant role, and suggested it was all the more necessary to place the village landholders under the healthy discipline of unimpeded transferability of title.

The results of this insistence are sufficiently notorious to have given rise to a simplistic caricature. Caught in a rigid tax system which required him to transfer a substantial portion of the produc-

tion of his holding to the state in cash payments, and tempted by his new credit-worthiness, the peasant, it is supposed, fell at once into the toils of the graindealer-moneylender and the forces of 'mercantile and usury capitalism' the latter represented. The purported outcome was the transfer by mortgage foreclosure and by forced and private sale of an alarmingly high proportion of land titles, a substantial part of which passed to the urban moneylending classes.

It was the loss of land rights, so the argument runs, that supplied the force behind the rural explosion of 1857. Although this is at once to lend the rebellion a predominantly economic interpretation, it is far from modern. Like most other theories of the revolt, it was one originally advanced by contemporaries, only to be taken up and embroidered by more recent historians. Indeed so struck were many senior officials by the agrarian character of the uprising that in the immediate post-Mutiny years inquiries and discussions were carried on with a view to restricting the power of land transfer.[17]

One of the most influential witnesses was William Edwards who wrote a book on his experiences in the Budaon district, and was thereafter quoted in official discussions on the political dangers of agrarian indebtedness and mortgage down to the time when Curzon at length put the Punjab Land Alienation Bill through the legislature in 1900.[18] Edwards was partnered in his views by other district officers who betook themselves to print, like C. Dundas Robertson in the Saharanpur district and Mark Thornhill in the Mathura (Muttra) district; while in the official *Narratives of Events* compiled in 1858, the widespread eviction of decree holders and auction purchasers and the popular hatred manifested towards the *bania* (moneylender) were given prominence in the reports on Bulandshahr, Hamirpur, Banda, and Allahabad. Sherer was particularly eloquent on Kanpur. Describing the situation following the first suppression of revolt in the district, he wrote:

> The ousted [village] zemindars [landholders] began to see that their dreams of getting rid of auction purchasers were over, and they must submit to their fate. These men were made our enemies by circumstances. We ruined them to be sure, but it was our attempt to benefit them, and if our desire to liberate them from the yoke of the Talookdar [or local overlord] had subjected them to the ten-times more disastrous yoke of the Borah [a banking

[17] See T. R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt* (Princeton, 1965), pp. 209 ff.
[18] P. H. M. Van den Dungen, *The Punjab Tradition* (London, 1972), p. 74.

caste], still the consummation was one we never contemplated. The selling up of estates, however, was one of the principal causes that gave the rebellion that popular phase it gradually assumed. Bacon has remarked with rare sagacity, that 'it is certain so many overthrown estates, so many votes for troubles'.[19]

Modern interpretation has reinforced this emphasis. Indeed, among some historians of a Marxist persuasion it may be carried so far as to suggest that the peasantry was the only true revolutionary force. While in the initial stages economic grievances and a powerful anti-foreigner sentiment might sweep disaffected magnate and gentry elements into rebellion, these were the first to give up the struggle, it is argued, and come to terms with the British. For the pressure from below, and its accompanying rapine and destructiveness, threatened their own property rights. 'The rebellion was crushed within the short time of two years', writes Talmiz Khaldun. 'It was crushed so easily because of betrayal by the propertied classes. To save their class interests, they committed suicide as a free people . . . The zemindars, both of the British and pre-British times, the merchants and the money lenders, the educated middle class and the native officials—all sided with the British or observed sullen neutrality as demanded by the circumstances in which they were caught. All looked to the British as saviours at a time when the Indian peasantry was fighting desperately to free itself of foreign as well as feudal bondage. Thus . . . the rebellion ended as a peasant war against indigenous landlordism and foreign imperialism.'[20]

Such an interpretation avowedly strips the movement of all the claims to proto-nationalism,[21] and has found little favour. The conviction of the mass uprising against the white man is too powerful, even the Marxist P. C. Joshi taking issue on this point. There was no evidence whatsoever, he urged, 'that the Indian peasantry during this struggle decisively burst through the feudal bond either politically or economically to transform a broad-based national uprising into a peasant war'. The peasantry attacked only the new British-created landlords, there was no struggle against landlords as a class; it was national and not a class war. So it was that Joshi could fall in with the populist account of the non-Marxist S. B. Chaudhuri. According to the latter, the public sale of land rights

19 *NE* i. 111.
20 Khaldun in Joshi, *Rebellion—1857*, pp. 51–2.
21 *Idem*, p. 4.

for default of revenue or in execution of decrees for debt 'not merely uprooted the ordinary people from their smallholdings but destroyed the gentry of the country, and both the orders being the victims of British civil law were united in the revolutionary epoch of 1857–8 in a common effort to recover what they had lost . . .'.[22] It was not so much the fear for their religion that provoked the rural classes and landed chiefs to revolt. 'It was the question of their rights and interests in the soil and hereditary holdings which excited them to a dangerous degree.'[23]

The most recent work of Western scholarship has given full support to this approach and to the interpretation of 1857 as primarily a broad, popular uprising. Thomas Metcalf sees the sepoy revolt as 'little more than the spark which touched off a smouldering mass of combustible material', recalling Disraeli's remark that 'The people of India were only waiting for an occasion and a pretext'.[24] As a result of agrarian grievances arising from British over-assessment and the passage of landed property to the moneylender, the bulk of the people in the North-Western Provinces, Metcalf asserts, gave their support to the rebel cause. And it was only against the new landlord class that rural violence was directed, binding together villager and the ancient superior proprietors in a common front. 'The rebellion in the countryside therefore . . . was not a jacquerie directed against the propertied classes, but a repudiation of the British system and a return to the *status quo ante.*'[25]

Historians are always tempted to essay some larger historical conspectus. Although confined to the northern half of the subcontinent, the 'Mutiny' is read as an all-India event and raised to universal significance. While it is conceded that the clash could have occurred only in a region where a critical revolutionary conjuncture took place—where martial and armed agricultural castes found their dominant position eroded by strong administrative pressures and intrusive commercial forces—on the higher historical plane, 1857 is seen as the retroactive explosion of indigenous society against the modernizing impulses of an alien colonial bureaucracy; it was 'the revolt of the old order against the new, goaded to

[22] S. B. Chaudhuri, *Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutinies* (Calcutta, 1957), p. 21.
[23] S. B. Chaudhuri, *Theories of the Indian Mutiny* (Calcutta, 1965), p. 135.
[24] W. F. Moneypenny and G. E. Buckle, *The Life of B. Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield* (London, 1929), i. 1491.
[25] Metcalf, *Aftermath*, p. 65.

desperation by the incessant pricks of modernity'. Whatever the truth contained in this view, there was no simple demonstration of this relationship. So far from the main rebellion zone being situated in the seabound regions longest exposed to advanced influences, the North-Western Provinces, still less Oudh and Central India, had had only a tardy and limited contact with modernity. Bengal in comparison had been much more extensively affected as the presence of Calcutta, the most advanced metropolis in Asia, made itself felt in the immediate hinterland. Yet in the unparalleled crisis of 1857, despite mounting evidence of agrarian grievance against *zamindar* and European indigo planter, the Bengalis remained to all outward view 'as dull and stagnant as the waters of one of their huge tanks in a sultry September'.[26] If the analysts of revolution have now come to conclude that the centres or hearths of revolutionary violence lie on the periphery rather than in the heartland of the modern sector, the corollary may carry farther. The nature of rural uprising in Upper India needs to be looked at more narrowly and its local differentiae observed, for historical truth marches only briefly to tunes of sounding generality. Such particular studies may throw up fresh contradictions to puzzle the understanding. But the preoccupation with the role of the peasantry in no way loses its importance. All the great issues of interpretation depend upon it. Whether the upheaval of 1857 was a great movement of proto-nationalism, or the historical register of the death agonies and birth-pangs accompanying the onset of acute social change, or merely a series of traditional village fights and local *jacqueries* against the moneylender, grain dealer, and tax official that automatically break out on every temporary power failure of the larger state structure, any such larger conclusion turns on the assessment of peasant action.

In any event the peasantry formed the vital link between military mutiny and rural turbulence. In a real sense the revolt was essentially the revolt of a peasant army breaking loose from its foreign masters. In the Bengal army, the landholding Chhattri (Rajput) and Brahmin experienced the shattering of the local horizons in which village life was commonly bound. They entered a brotherhood closely knit by the frequent interchange of regiments between widely flung cantonments, each regiment possessing its own set of native officers who had risen up from the ranks and were accus-

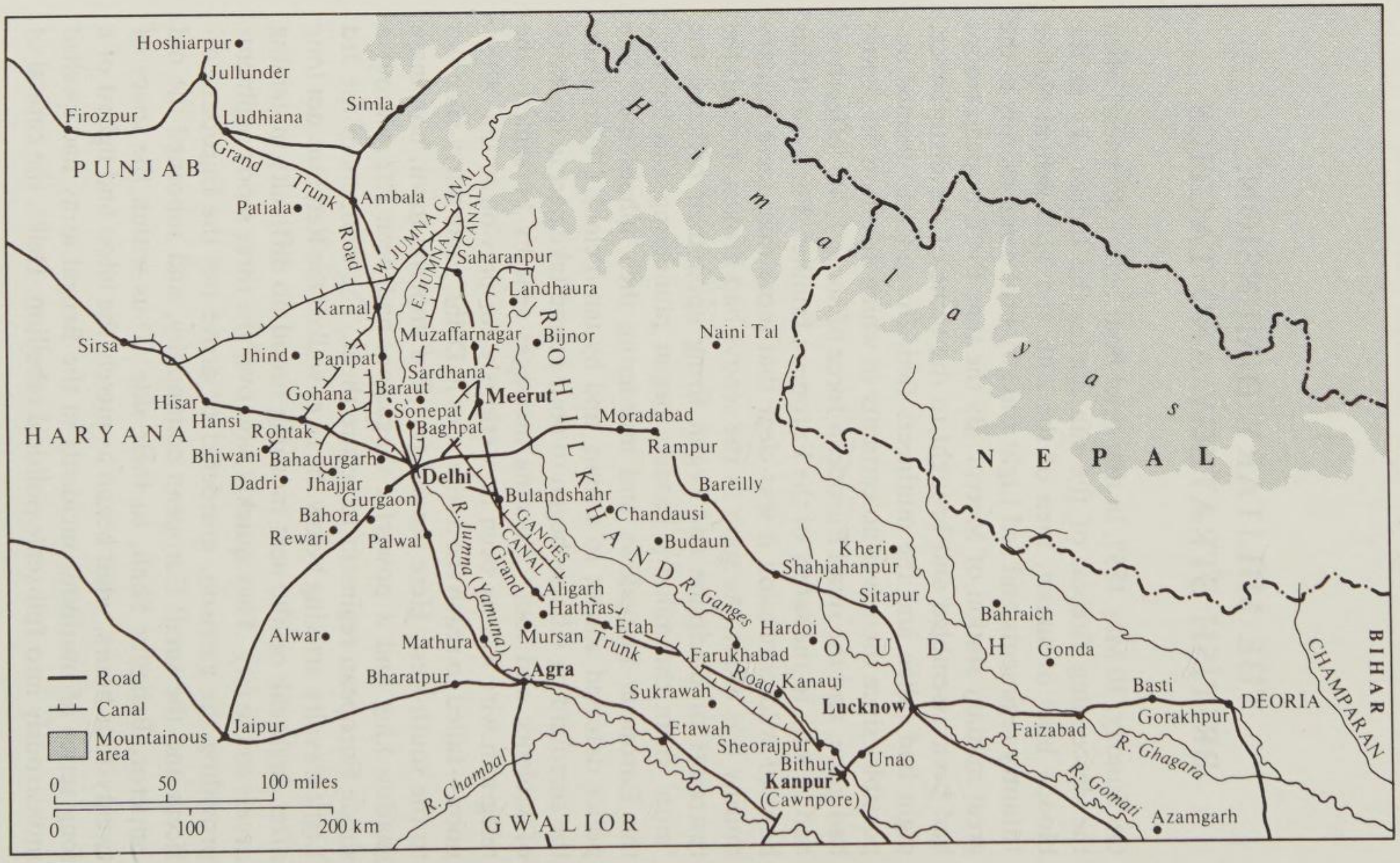
[26] Anon., 'Life in the Rice Fields', *Calcutta Review*, xxix (1957), 155.

tomed to command companies on detachment and to bear considerable responsibility. Here was an organization almost entirely in Indian hands, whose loyalties were wider than any Indian state and superior to caste or religion, with artillery, magazines, and the full *matériel* of war under its control. Hitherto it had stood isolated from the politics of the princely courts and was only stirred into disaffection through service grievances over pay and conditions. But once the sepoy had been moved to treat the white officer's orders with deliberate defiance, there was no saying where he might not go. For as in all fragile military despotisms any mutiny of the army predicated political revolution.

1

THE MILITARY DIMENSION: BRITISH STRATEGY AND TACTICS

On Sunday, 10 May 1857, in that brief hour before darkness, when the descending fireball of the sun ignites the Indian sky in the bloody hues of sunset, men of the 20th and 11th Bengal Native Infantry regiments and 3rd Light Cavalry broke into mutiny at the great military station of Meerut. By the time the European troops had been assembled and brought to the scene of the disturbance, night had fallen and the mutineers fled. Pursuit was deemed impossible, since there was no certainty in which direction the sepoys had gone, and the small European force of some 1,700 'effectives' had to look to the safety of the European families. For even at this hour of wild confusion it was clear that more than mere military mutiny was afoot. As soon as the sepoys had broken through the restraints of discipline and begun firing upon their officers, the 'mob' from the military bazaars began plundering and burning the European bungalows and murdering their inhabitants. The police defected almost to a man, and by ten o'clock Gujars from the surrounding villages began to pour in and take part in the work of violence and loot. Warning messages sent by horsemen—the telegraph wire having been mysteriously cut previously that afternoon—failed to reach the authorities in Delhi, some thirty-six miles to the south-west. Here the old fortified imperial town, housing a shadow-king and a powerful magazine, had been left without a single European regiment to secure them. The troopers of the 3rd Light Cavalry arriving below the river wall of the Red Fort not long after daybreak on the next morning found no difficulty in gaining access to the city. They quickly won over the three sepoy regiments providing the garrison, murdered or drove out the European officers and the small European community, and suborned the old emperor, Bahadur Shah, to their side. Thus within the space of twenty-four hours, what began as merely the latest and ugliest of a long series of mutinous incidents in the Bengal army had swelled monstrously into full-scale political rebellion. Delhi, the capital of



1. Northern India

the *ancien régime*, had assumed the leadership of a movement to liberate India from the white man's yoke.

Even then the rebellion could have been scotched swiftly as a snake or at least driven back into its hole. But it was not until 8 June that the British were able to get a force before the walls of Delhi. The interval was fatal. For a week or more after the seizure of the city there was no further uprising; then one by one, the Indian regiments at the stations to the eastward began to go up, first at Aligarh on 20 May, and then in the next few days at Mainpuri, Bulandshahr, Etawah, and Mathura. In the opening week of June the movement became a rush leaping across the North-Western Provinces as far as Benares and carrying away with it the entire fabric of the civil administration. Except for Lucknow, Kanpur, and Agra, where the British held out, their authority throughout a key area and model province collapsed almost overnight. Where and when would the movement end? What was its real nature?

Some things were perceivable, even to Canning, the Governor-General, whose knowledge of India was limited to a year's residence in Calcutta and to what he could learn from his officials, his maps, and the incessant barrage of paper that poured across his desk. There could be no swift help from England; under the most favourable conditions reinforcements dispatched on the long haul round the Cape could not alter the local situation until the commencement of the cold weather in November. The full shock of the crisis had to be met and overcome from local resources. In 1857 there were some 45,000 European troops in India and some 232,000 regular Indian troops.[1] The bulk of these, 24,000 British and 136,000 Indian, were serving in the Bengal Presidency and its dependencies, a region which stretched from Rangoon to the Khyber Pass. The latter in turn, particularly the European units, were most heavily concentrated as an army of occupation in the recently conquered Punjab. At the moment when almost the entire Bengal native army suddenly failed its imperial masters, fourteen

[1] Estimates of troop figures vary considerably; see the discussion of these in H. Chattopadhyaya, *The Sepoy Mutiny. A Social Study and Analysis* (Calcutta, 1957), pp. 64–8. The main discrepancy over European troops between the figures of some 39,000 and 45,000 would seem to be explained by the fact that one included commissioned officers and the other did not, but evidently a significant number of officers were serving in civil employ.

of the nineteen European regiments in the Bengal Presidency were stationed in the Punjab and the adjacent Meerut division. To protect Calcutta and to hold the whole line of country between Calcutta and Delhi there were but five white regiments. Two (HM 53rd and 84th) were in the vicinity of Calcutta, the next (HM 10th) was 350 miles away at Dinapur, the cantonment which guarded Patna, the capital of Bihar. Beyond this was a yawning void. There was no European regiment in Benares, where the vital Grand Trunk Road coming up from Calcutta crossed the Ganges; there was none at the strategic confluence of the Ganges and Jumna at Allahabad; none at the military supply base of Kanpur. Only Lucknow, capital of the newly annexed state of Oudh (Awadh), and Agra, the administrative capital of the North-Western Provinces, were protected by one weak European regiment each (HM 32nd and 3rd Bengal European Fusiliers). Canning was guilty of only slight exaggeration when in appealing to Lord Elgin to divert the China expeditionary force, he wrote that 'Bengal, with its stretch of seven hundred and fifty miles from Barrackpore to Agra, guarded by nothing but the 10th Queen's [at Dinapur], cannot wait, if the flame should spread'.[2]

Some aid could be derived from other parts of the Indian empire. A European regiment apiece could be summoned rapidly from Madras and Burma (1st Madras European Fusiliers and HM 35th); two British regiments (HM 64th and 78th Highlanders) returning to Bombay from the Persian expedition could be transhipped immediately to Calcutta; and by the best of British luck the China expeditionary force was at sea and could be diverted *en route*, bringing a further two regiments, with another one to follow from Mauritius (HM 5th, and from Britain HM 90th, with HM 32nd and 93rd Highlanders following later). These would constitute the only *masse de manœuvre* available below Delhi, but a portion would merely go to make up the wastage from sickness and disease that so rapidly wore out European troops in the Indian climate. And European troops were considered vital. With almost the entire Bengal native army of 74 infantry regiments and 10 cavalry regiments, together with many of the irregular forces, proving rebel or untrustworthy, the British had no thought of rushing in Bombay or Madrasi sepoys. Some of these might later be employed strongly

[2] Canning to Elgin, MS Correspondence of Lord Canning, cited in Kaye, *Sepoy War*, i. 600 n.

brigaded with European units, just as the Punjabis were used earlier with effect. But for the immediate crisis, white soldiers had to come forward as the principal agents in upholding the white man's raj.

At first Canning, and indeed John Lawrence, the Chief Commissioner of the Punjab, imagined that Delhi could be recovered easily by a quick riposte delivered by the four European regiments which the Commander-in-Chief had at hand on the Himalayan slopes near Simla and at Ambala, some 120 miles north-west of Delhi up the Grand Trunk Road. Even Disraeli thought that General Anson 'long considered the finest whist player in Europe . . . had seen the Great Mogul so often on the ace of spades that he would know how to deal with him'.[3] But the unreadiness of commissariat and transport, and the deliberate nature of the older military mind, ruled out lightning advance. By the time the British had fought their way on to the Ridge overlooking Delhi on 9 June rebellion had rolled up the country beyond, and the original six mutinous regiments in possession of the city were daily being reinforced by newly mutinied corps. It was soon evident that so far from the British force retaking the city by a *coup de main*, it was as much as they could do to hold their position on the Ridge against incessant attacks. The recapture of the city would require at least a trebling of their force and the aid of a powerful siege train. Lawrence was slow to grasp this truth, concerned as he naturally was to keep a secure hold on his own province of the Punjab. He had already parted with four of his twelve European regiments. Of the remaining eight, three were stationed in the sickly Peshawar valley guarding the North-West frontier, leaving five weak regiments to hold the country between the Sutlej and the Indus. The European regiments were enmeshed with some thirty-two regular native infantry and cavalry regiments and these were composed almost entirely of the traditional Hindi-speaking military castes recruited from the North-Western Provinces and Oudh and comprised together some 36,000 men. The authorities now sought to disarm them as opportunity offered and

[3] For Canning's optimism, see message to Sir H. Barnard (recd. for re-transmission at Kanpur on 2 June 1857) in which he states that the artillery will 'enable you to dispose of Delhi with certainty' and asks him to detach a force to move down the Doab to recover Aligarh and relieve Kanpur: G. W. Forrest, *Selections from State Papers preserved in the Military Department of the Government of India, 1857–58* (Calcutta 1893–1912), ii. 113. Also Moneypenny and Buckle, *Life of Disraeli*, i. 1487.

replaced them with newly raised Punjabi troops. Hence the only reinforcements Lawrence was at first prepared to offer to the Delhi Field Force were non-European: the Guides, the 4th Sikhs, the 1st Punjab Cavalry, and a squadron of the 2nd Punjab Cavalry. General Reed's clamant call for more troops prompted Lawrence to report on 16 June that he was forwarding 1,250 Europeans and 2,000 Punjabis, all with arms, but he pleaded the difficulty of doing more. Although by this later date sixteen infantry and three cavalry regiments had mutinied and had been disarmed in the Punjab, there were still twelve Bengal native infantry regiments with arms, besides regular and irregular cavalry units of doubtful fidelity.[4] On these grounds he refused to part with Nicholson and the Movable Column.[5]

Lawrence was, of course, subjected to strong internal pressures from colleagues concerned to put the safety of the Punjab above all else. Edwards put the view of the 'Punjab first' school with characteristic vigour on 26 June:

> . . . you should not go on throwing away your means in detail by meeting General Reed's demands for reinforcements. Delhi is not India, and if General Reed cannot take it with eight thousand men, he will not take it with nine thousand or ten thousand. However important a point, enough has been done for it. You will serve the Empire better by holding the Punjab than by sacrificing the Punjab and recovering Delhi. You will sacrifice the Punjab, if you either withdraw General Cotton's force from Peshawur, or fritter away Nicholson's Movable Column, already too weak. Make a stand! 'Anchor, Hardy, anchor:' Tell General Reed he can have no more men from here, and must either get into Delhi with the men he has, or get reinforcements from below, or abandon the siege and fall back on the Sutleg, leaving Delhi and its dependencies to be reorganised in the cold weather. There are two policies open to you: to treat the Punjab as secondary to the North-West Provinces and go on giving and giving troops to General Reed till you break down in the Punjab, or to maintain the Punjab as your first duty and the most important point of the two . . . .[6]

Once again the value of the new reinforcements to the Delhi Field Force was largely cancelled out by a fresh accession of strength to the ranks of the rebels. On 1 July, with their Christian bandsmen

[4] *Punjab Government Records: Mutiny Records—Correspondence*, vii, pt. 1 (Lahore, 1911), pp. 141–2, 164.

[5] *Idem*, *PGR* vii, ii. 350.

[6] Kaye, *Sepoy War*, ii. 614–15.

repeatedly playing: 'Cheer, boys, Cheer',[7] the Bareilly brigade of four infantry and an irregular cavalry regiment, with artillery, marched over the Jumna bridge of boats into the rebel camp exactly as some 2,000 of Lawrence's reinforcements entered the British encampment on the Ridge. These with their comrades were steadily consumed in the fire of battle. Originally the British had arrived before Delhi with a total force numbering barely 3,800; by the beginning of July, after reinforcement, they still numbered no more than 5,000 in round numbers.[8] And when Archdale Wilson succeeded to the command in mid-July, the essential fighting element—the infantry—remained 'only 2,200 European and 1,500 Native bayonets'.[9]

If this was the situation on the strongest flank, the British position lower down the Gangetic plain looked still more parlous. Here the spread of mutiny owed much to the fear provoked by British countermeasures. On 19 May, in the knowledge that the 1st Madras Fusiliers had already embarked for Calcutta and HM 34th sent for from Rangoon and Moulmein, Canning had decided to dispatch up-country one of the two European regiments guarding the capital. On the same day, Wheeler in Kanpur was told to 'make all preparations for the accommodation of a European force, and to let it be known that you are doing so'.[10] But to move troops swiftly meant breaking up their regimental formations and sending them in small detachments by horse carriage, bullock cart, and steamer. As Lady Canning said, it was 'really like sending reinforcements in teaspoonfuls, though in great numbers'.[11] The Madras Fusiliers were sent up-country in this fashion immediately after they began to arrive in Calcutta from 23 May. By 2 June Wheeler could report that 90 men of the 84th and 15 men of the Madras Fusiliers had reached him at Kanpur, and some of the former he later passed on to Lucknow. But these white reinforcements were too few to save

[7] R. H. W. Dunlop, *Service and Adventure with the Khakee Ressalah* (London, 1858), p. 54. The Bareilly brigade was estimated to comprise 2,300 fighting men with 1,000 carts for followers' baggage and plunder. (J. C. Wilson's report, *NE* i. 415.)

[8] Sir Henry Barnard, C.-in-C., to Lawrence, 3 July 1857, cited Kaye, Sepoy War, ii. 564–5.

[9] Archdale Wilson to his wife (n.f.). The official return on 13 July gave a total of exactly 2,400 European infantry on effective strength (PP 1857–8, xliv, pt. 1, p. 109), but in the action of 14 July the force suffered more than 200 casualties (*idem*. p. 107).

[10] Forrest, *State Papers*, ii. 106.

[11] A. J. C. Hare, *The Story of Two Noble Lives* (London, 1895), ii. 191.

him. They were sufficient to provoke but not to overawe. Their arrival served merely to heighten the tension created by the preparation of Wheeler's pitiful entrenchment and helped precipitate the long-simmering outbreak on 6 June. Certainly the fear of the approach of white troops had some part in the events at Allahabad on the same day. Here as a result of orders made on 19 May, some 70 invalid white troops from Chunar had been moved into Allahabad Fort.[12] But the main reinforcement was expected from the Madras Fusiliers. On 3 June, Neill reached Benares, seventy miles down the Ganges, and the following day took part in the disarming parade at Benares of the 37th NI which went seriously awry. The sepoys broke away and the British guns opened on them with grape. The fugitives were expected to make for Allahabad, where the garrison was ordered to take up positions to resist their comrades and await the avenging arm of Neill. In the tense excitement at Allahabad, the 6th NI fell suddenly upon their officers, and in an instant the city and the surrounding countryside blazed into rebellion. The white survivors managed, however, to secure the Fort which guarded the bridge of boats carrying the Grand Trunk Road across the Ganges.

But if British efforts to reinforce the stations up-country with European troops and disarm suspected sepoy units had the inevitable effect of provoking the spread of mutiny, they also succeeded in setting the beginnings of territorial limits to the zone of revolt. Neill arrived at Allahabad on 11 June to consolidate the wavering British hold on the Fort; by 17 June he had recovered the civil station and driven out the rebellious Muslim religious leader, Liaqat Ali, and his followers, towards Kanpur. In Calcutta, Canning breathed again: 'Allahabad . . . that point, the most precious in India at this moment, and for many years the most neglected, is safe, thank God!'[13] Meanwhile, at the other end of the Doab, Archdale Wilson had at length sallied forth from Meerut and at the Hindan River on 27 and 28 May had inflicted a sharp reverse on a large mutineer force from Delhi that was intent on extending rebel power. Wilson's force had then united with the Commander-in-Chief's advancing down the Grand Trunk Road from Ambala to Delhi, and together on 8 June they won the action of Badli-ki-Serai

[12] OC Allahabad to Mily. Sec. G of I, 23 May 1857, India Milit. Progs., 5 June, No. 224, IOL.

[13] Canning to Vernon Smith, 19 June 1857. Letters to the President of the Board of Control: Canning Papers.

a few miles north of the imperial city. On the great line of communication running from Calcutta to Peshawar, rebellion had been end-stopped. By the third week of June, while British authority in the Doab and Oudh had almost totally collapsed, and disturbances had reached into parts of Bihar on the one hand and much of the lower Punjab and Central India on the other, the actual break in the vital military artery of the Grand Trunk Road had been limited to the 400-mile gap between Allahabad and Delhi.

The ability of the British to pass troops and supplies along the Grand Trunk Road through hostile or disturbed country was one of the oddest features of the campaign, so vulnerable did it appear to attack and so difficult to guard. But in the absence of aggressive local guerrilla movements or of organized flank attacks by trained forces, British military formations moved along it with the sureness of destroyers passing over a dark and turbulent ocean. It was not the last time a colonial power would find that so long as it could secure the key towns and connecting highway leading to the main military concentration of rebellion, it could afford from a narrow military viewpoint to ignore its own loss of control over the intermediate countryside. For the British Raj had always been a fragile form of military occupation. Even the European officers of the civil administration were confined to a few district headquarter towns. Loss of authority in the districts meant loss of revenue resources, but this could be borne for a time, so long as no formed opposition developed from them.

In effect, the first British military counteraction also helped draw a rough and ragged boundary between a zone of rebellion and a zone of mutiny. The latter was naturally the most far-ranging, extending over the whole area where troops of the Bengal native army were stationed or where the Hindi-speaking 'purbias' (easterners) and others recruited from the upper Ganges plain were serving in the units of the Bombay and Madras armies.[14] Outbreaks occurred as far apart as Peshawar (Punjab) and Singapore, Chittagong (Assam) and Poonamallee (Madras), Karachi (Sindh) and

[14] For the composition of the Bombay and Madras armies, see Kaye, *Sepoy War*, i. 622–4. This gives figures from the report of the Royal Commission on the Indian Army, using a return from the East India House, dated Sept. 1858. These show that over two-thirds of the three Bombay native cavalry regiments and nearly one-half of the 29 Bombay native infantry regiments were recruited from 'Hindoostan' of the upper Gangetic plain region. In contrast, the Madras native army had only a tiny sprinkling of Hindustanis.

Kolhapur (Bombay). But these for the most part were isolated occurrences and readily put down. To prove dangerous, mutiny depended on sympathetic detonation, and this required contiguity. Hence the effective zone of mutiny was limited to the area solidly garrisoned by the Bengal native army and related irregular contingents, that is, to India north of the Narmada River. Within this area the zone of rebellion was defined largely through local circumstance.

How far sepoy mutiny would pass over into civil rebellion depended on whether the mutineers were powerful enough to wrest control of a district headquarters and force the European inhabitants to flee; and whether in turn, after the sepoys had marched off to join their comrades at one of the nodal points of rebellion, there were local magnates willing and able to establish some form of civil and military authority. These conditions obtained where district towns had been left without European troops and where no alternative counterpoise to the sepoys was available, such as dependable military levies and police or the armed retainers of friendly landholders. In much of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh it proved relatively easy under these circumstances for sepoy units to seize control of the adjacent civil station and appropriate the contents of the treasury before they made off for Delhi, Kanpur, or Lucknow. In the Punjab, conditions were reversed. Despite the large numbers of sepoy units, almost every centre of importance possessed a European force and a reliable local counterpoise. There was no question of the sepoys seizing control; they simply rose and fled. In the lower provinces British countermeasures secured the key towns below Allahabad. Even if the countryside lapsed into turbulence, there was little opportunity for rebellion to acquire a larger scope and organization so long as the district headquarters town remained secure in British hands. Hence under these defining conditions, the main rebellion zone was becoming clear by the beginning of July 1857, and the British moved to contain it.

They did so almost inadvertently, undertaking tasks beyond their immediate strength. The burning incentive was the rescue of their kinsfolk beleaguered in Kanpur and Lucknow, but they were also informed by a shrewd political instinct that the best defence lay in attack. Thus it was that Renaud on 30 June, followed by Havelock on 7 July, pushed on from Allahabad to the relief of Kanpur amid the monsoon downpour. Their joint force numbered no more than

1,400 British bayonets and 560 Indian auxiliary troops. It was half the size intended.[15] The transportation of troops in small groups by bullock train and steamer made them a ready prey for detention *en route* by the local authorities eager to use them for their own immediate security problems. When he arrived on 30 June to take over the Movable Column collected at Allahabad, Havelock found that instead of the equivalent of three European regiments collected together, half his force was strung out along his line of communication. There had been no want of time. The 84th had started up-country on 19 May. The Madras Fusiliers had begun landing in Calcutta on 23 May, the 64th and 78th Highlanders had followed on 9 June.[16] Yet the Madras Fusiliers (Neill's Blue Caps) on arriving in Benares became caught up in the 'disarming crisis' of 4 June; detachments were then retained there as garrison troops while others were sent to clear the road and river line to Allahabad.[17] The 64th and 78th had similar experiences, detachments of them being held back with or without the sanction of Calcutta at Gaya, Ghazipur, and elsewhere. After the two advance companies of the 78th Highlanders ('the regiment of demons who wear no clothes') reached Benares, they were employed on a local punitive column against the turbulent Rajput villagers in the Dobhi *taluq* of Jaunpur district, returning on 30 June too late to join Havelock's force. The rest of the regiment had been detained nearly a week in the Calcutta vicinity, calming the fears of the European residents during Panic Sunday (14 June) and assisting in disarming the remaining sepoy regiments at Barrackpore. The result was that when Havelock caught up Renaud's advance column, two marches beyond Allahabad, his

[15] India Milit. Progs., 12 June 1857, No. 267; Hare, *Story of Two Noble Lives*, p. 209.

[16] For 1st Madras Fusiliers, see H. C. Wylly, *Neill's Blue Caps* (Aldershot, 1926); also F. C. Maude and J. W. Sherer, *Memories of the Mutiny* (London, 1894), i. 31–2. Letter of Lt. William Hargood, 26 June 1857 (typed copy), National Army Museum Acc. 5206–10. On the 78th Ross-shire Buffs/Seaford Highlanders, see H. Davidson, *History and Services of the 78th Highlanders* (Edinburgh, 1901), p. 185 and *passim*. For its detention *en route* up country, India Milit. Progs., 19 June 1857, Nos. 275–9, 292.

[17] The combined force on 12 July stood thus:

1st Madras Fusiliers	376	HM 78th	284
HM 64th	435	HM 84th	190

On the 64th and 78th at Ghazipur, see diary of Magistrate J. H. Box, cited I. G. Sieveking, *Turning Point in the Mutiny. A Secondary Account of the Siege of Arrah* (London, 1910), p. 140.

total force comprised four token European infantry regiments, not one of them even up to half-strength.

Nevertheless the objectives remained grandiose. The news of Wheeler's capitulation at Kanpur and the destruction of his force did not alter them. The plan remained to recover Kanpur and relieve the Lucknow Residency before pushing the column up the Doab towards Delhi. Even Havelock was deluded over the size of the force required and persistently underestimated the scale of the task before him. The ease with which he drove back the Nana Sahib's forces in actions fought between Allahabad and Kanpur deceived him. After the recovery of Kanpur on 17 July, the total reinforcements that could be brought up from Allahabad to form a garrison under Neill for the newly captured town consisted of 227 Europeans. But Havelock remained undismayed. On 23 July, when he had got two-thirds of his force successfully across on to the Oudh side of the rain-swollen Ganges, he was telegraphing his confident hope that Lucknow would soon be in his hands and requested instructions for his future operations. On July 26, his Quartermaster General, Lt.-Col. Tytler, wrote to Meerut to say that Lucknow would be relieved in four days and that they would probably march to Delhi with four or five thousand Europeans and a numerous artillery. Five thousand men of the China force had landed in Calcutta and were expected immediately.

It was only when Havelock had joined his 1,200 Europeans and 300 Sikh troops across the Ganges, had seen the waterlogged terrain and heard the spies' reports that this sunny confidence suddenly clouded over. On 27 July, before he had committed his troops to battle, he called for the four European regiments with him to be made up to full strength, or for HM 5th Fusiliers and the 90th Foot, the first of the China force, to be sent up entire. By the next day, he had dropped the alternative and asked for all these troops together, a request which if it could have been granted would have multiplied his infantry strength almost sixfold. The hard-fought actions at Unao and Bashiratganj on 29 July confirmed his apprehensions. Between Allahabad and Kanpur, his opponents had never numbered more than 5,000. Now they were computed at 13,000 while battle casualties, cholera, and dysentery had reduced his own effectives to 850 tired men. He fell back nearer the Ganges to find that only 257 men were forthcoming as reinforcements. With these he fought the second action at Bashiratganj on 5 August. It served,

along with further intelligence reports of the defended river obstacles along the Lucknow road, to convince him that he was too weak to press on. Falling back again towards the river, he made one more defensive lunge, and then, on 13 August, pulled his force back across the river into Kanpur. After a sally on 16 August against a regathering of sepoys at the Nana's former seat at Bithur, Havelock's little army was then reduced by sickness to its lowest point, some 685 bayonets, exclusive of the force manning the entrenchment.

In this fashion, despite more than 40,000 European troops in India at the outbreak of the revolt, the British were able to bring into action at the critical point of conflict as late as the end of July no more than 1,500 white infantrymen at Delhi and less than 1,000 on the road to Lucknow. It was the image of such tiny numbers pitted against untold thousands that to the home-staying Englishman gave these petty battles their legendary character and heroic proportions. But the situation more truly reflected the inability of the British to concentrate their military resources at the decisive points. In both theatres there was a similar experience. After a successful approach march and initial victories, a weak British column was forced to retire into a fortified redoubt and adopt a masking role towards a far more numerous enemy concentration.

Circumstances contrived to protract this period of British weakness and give rebellion a breathing space to spread and develop. It has been seen already how the fighting fronts were starved of reinforcements by the tendency manifested in both the Punjab and Bengal to hold back white troops as insurance for their own local security.

Wilson at Delhi managed to extort reinforcements only by putting a pistol to Lawrence's head. On taking over command in mid-July he found there was no prospect of obtaining relief from down-country, the hope Lawrence had always voiced in justification of his retention of so many troops in the Punjab. Wilson now told him that he 'must be *strongly* reinforced and that *speedily*' otherwise his force would be so reduced by battle casualties and sickness that 'nothing will be left but to retreat to Kurnaul [Karnal]', leaving the rebels in unfettered possession of Delhi.[18] The threat of withdrawal was sufficient. Lawrence grasped the problem in all its magnitude and responded immediately. With his own mutinies and disarming

[18] Kaye and Malleson, *History of the Indian Mutiny*, ii. 441.

crises surmounted, he promised on 23 July that 'every man that can possibly be spared shall be sent' and arranged the dispatch of a force of 4,200 men, including 1,300 Europeans. This was the famous Movable Column under Nicholson. It was not a man too many, and still left the British to carry out the assault against Delhi in September with a largely Indian force in which the effective European infantry element was no more than 2,300 bayonets.

Yet just as Lawrence in the Punjab was in a position by the end of July to overcome the disposition to hold back troops for local purposes, this tendency was suddenly and powerfully strengthened in Bengal because of a totally unexpected débâcle at Dinapur on 25 July. Here the disarming of the three native infantry regiments—the 7th, 8th, and 40th NI—miscarried grievously. The sepoys broke away and fled westwards to the jungles about Arrah in Shahabad district where they rallied under the leadership of the old Rajput chieftain, Koer (Kunwar) Singh. On 29 July they caught a pursuing force of some 450 Europeans and Sikhs in a night ambuscade near Arrah and routed them with deadly effect. This late outbreak at Dinapur coinciding with that of the 12th Irregular Cavalry at Sigauli sent a shock wave throughout Bihar and down the Grand Trunk Road. On 1 August, every civil station, save two, in the Patna division was evacuated by European officials. At Hazaribagh, only 100 miles from the railhead at Raniganj, a detachment of the 8th NI rose on 30 July, drove the Europeans from the station, looted the treasury, and released the prisoners from the gaol. Disturbance ran throughout Chota Nagpur region, and communications along the Grand Trunk Road, including the vital telegraph line up-country, were cut.

It was the low point of British fortunes. July had been a month of gathering gloom for Canning. Before then he had been able to confine his attention to the main axis of revolt represented by the Ganges and the Grand Trunk Road between Patna and Delhi, and could afford to ignore the tremors on its southern flank. The mutinies at Nasirabad and Nimach in Rajputana (28 May and 3 June), at Jhansi (6 June), Gwalior (14 June), Naugaon and Banda (14 June) had done little more than swell the numbers of sepoys gathering at Delhi, Kanpur, and Lucknow. But at the beginning of July, the flame of mutiny had carried southwards. Simultaneous outbreaks on 1 July at Indore, including the neighbouring cantonment at Mhow, and at Sagar (Saugor) extended the zone of rebellion to

the Narmada river and threatened the Bombay Deccan beyond. News of the recovery of Delhi proved false, and it became all too evident that the hopes of rapidly dousing the fire of rebellion at its source must be given up. On 20 July, Canning felt it necessary to ask London for a further 15,000 British troops in addition to the 24,000 already requested:

> Looking to the worst, we may fear that Delhi will not fall until the cold weather arrives and our English reinforcements can be pushed up. That in that interval the flame may spread to Southern India—and that if so, the further amount of troops asked for, even if procurable at once, will not arrive a day too soon. I do not fear for the Punjab as I do for the Deccan.[19]

In this state of apprehension came the news of the Dinapur disaster, 'the greatest evil that has befallen us since Delhi was seized'.[20] Canning now told Vernon Smith, president of the India Board in London, that with Wilson threatening to withdraw the Delhi Field Force to Karnal, ministers had to be prepared, whatever happened, 'for Delhi remaining in the hands of the insurgents until reinforcements can be sent there from Calcutta'. Of this there was no tangible prospect for all upward movement had been paralysed by the Dinapur outbreak, and the means for strengthening Havelock's force at Kanpur had to be diverted to pacifying Bihar and Bengal. 'For the moment', wrote Canning, 'everything must give way to the necessity of arresting rebellion or general disorder below Benares. If this is not done, our slender remains of revenue will be in jeopardy, and every isolated Native Regiment will mutiny.'[21]

These fears were overdrawn. By mid-August the British military situation was much less desperate. On 12 August Vincent Eyre followed up his triumphant relief of Arrah by driving the Dinapur mutineers and clansmen under Koer Singh from his stronghold at Jagdishpur. Shergatti, Gaya, and Hazaribagh, places along or flanking the Grand Trunk Road, were quickly reoccupied, and the Road itself, with its vital telegraph line, was reopened to traffic. On

[19] Canning to Vernon Smith, 20 July 1857; Canning Papers, vol. 57, No. 58. Canning told Elgin the effect would be to raise the European strength from 41,000 to 80,000; Canning to Elgin, 21 July 1857, vol. 57, No. 23. On 19 July Lady Canning expressed to a correspondent the fear that the revolt 'may go down the centre of the country, through all the Mussulman population of the Deccan and Nizam'. 'The last fortnight', she wrote on 27 July, 'had been the blackest of all' (Hare, *Story of Two Noble Lives*, ii. 239, 246).

[20] Canning to Vernon Smith, 9 Aug. 1857; Canning Papers, vol. 57, No. 79.

[21] Canning to Vernon Smith, 8 Aug. 1857; Canning Papers, vol. 57, No. 79.

2 August Canning had appointed Outram to the military command of the Dinapur and Kanpur divisions with the primary duty of restoring order in Bengal and Bihar, but by 22 August he was able to acknowledge that 'the flame has not spread so widely in Bengal and Behar as I thought', and he hoped that Outram could now proceed to the front without anything to detain him below Allahabad.[22] Canning's anxiety over the spread of insurrection to the Deccan proved equally unsubstantiated, despite the mutiny of the 27th Bombay Native Infantry at Kolhapur on 31 July. On 2 August the Bombay relief column, marching northwards and previously diverted to deal with trouble at Aurangabad, at length reached Mhow. The line of the Narmada, the barrier—in Durand's words—'between the blazing north and the smouldering south', had been saved.[23] Rebellion was again being contained.

Yet once the immediate crisis was past, it proved immensely difficult to disengage and reconstitute units which had been dispersed in detachments throughout Bengal and Bihar, and to forward them as fighting formations to the main theatre of war. Although the line of communications had been cleared, the hilly south-western portion of the Chotanagpur division of Bihar witnessed scattered rebellion that was not finally suppressed until 1859.[24] Moreover, for all his insistent urging upon Lawrence of the need to release every available man for the main struggle at Delhi, Canning was not untainted by a certain provincialism himself. He tended to aid and abet the detention of troops down-country, and found himself at odds with Colin Campbell, the new Commander-in-Chief, who arrived in Calcutta from Britain on 13 August:

> It is difficult to persuade him [Campbell] of the vast importance of preserving peace at Patna, the centre of Mahomedan fanaticism in Bengal, and at the same time the Head Quarters of the Opium revenue, or of keeping down by a show of force the wild jungly Rajahs on the South West of the Trunk Road, who, if left to themselves, will rise against each other and probably bring another whole war upon us. These and other like cases make it impossible to adhere rigidly to the rule of keeping our whole moveable European Force together, and to avoid all detached operations . . .[25]

[22] Canning to Vernon Smith, 22 Aug. 1857; Canning Papers, vol. 57, No. 81.

[23] H. M. Durand, Agent for the Governor-General in Central India; cited Malleson, *History of the Indian Mutiny*, i. 242.

[24] Cf. Jagdish Narayan Sarkar, 'The Mutiny of 1857–58 and the Palaman Jagirdars', *Journal of the Bihar Research Society*, xli (1955), 529 ff.

[25] Canning to Vernon Smith, 22 Aug. 1857; Canning Papers, vol. 57, No. 83. Cf. the criticism of Henry Dale of the guides, 27 Oct. 1857: 'Lord Canning had to

It was this kind of thinking that led Havelock, who remained dangerously isolated at Kanpur, to follow the earlier example of Wilson at Delhi. On 21 August he telegraphed dramatically to Colin Campbell: 'If I do not get any promise of reinforcement from your Excellency, by return of telegraph, I will retire at once towards Allahabad.'[26] The threat was enough to produce an instant response, coinciding as it did with a message from Lucknow describing the growing plight of the British force besieged in the Residency. Even then it took Outram until 15 September to come up to Kanpur with reinforcements, and these were but an odd assortment of 1,449 men without cavalry. Only HM 90th Light Infantry were more than half strength (numbering some 646 all ranks); apart from the headquarters of the 5th Fusiliers, the remainder were the detachments of the 64th, 84th, and 78th, of whom Havelock had been deprived by their detention down-country at the beginning of July. In the exaggerated language of Innes: 'There still remained between Allahabad and Calcutta the 10th, 29th, 37th and 53rd, besides other regiments. But all these, instead of being sent on to the front, were being kept in those southern districts, not by order from headquarters, but through the interference of local officers. They were thus being diverted from their proper course and frittered away broadcast; and while Havelock's force at the gravest scene of operations, could barely muster 1,100 men, some 6,000 men who might have been on their way to his support were pottering about to the south-west of Benares.'[27]

In his pleas for reinforcement Havelock had boasted that 'With 2,000 British soldiers nothing could stand before me and my powerful artillery'.[28] In the event, when he crossed the Ganges with Outram on 19 September for the relief of Lucknow this proved to be roughly the strength of his British infantry (in a total force of about some 2,800).[29] Again the British had underestimated the task

answer for the delay at Lucknow . . . [He] seems to have had thought and care for nothing but Calcutta and Bengal. . . . Lord Canning at first was plucky; as the troubles gained strength he lost it' (Daly, *Memoirs of Sir Henry Dermot Daly*, London, 1905, p. 182).

[26] Forrest, *State Papers*, ii. 193.

[27] J. J. M. Innes, *The Sepoy Revolt: A Critical Narrative* (London, 1897), p. 176.

[28] Havelock to C.-in-C., telegram, 20 Aug. 1857; Forrest, *State Papers*, ii. 192.

[29] J. W. Fortescue, *History of the British Army* (London, 1930), xiii. 311, states the joint forces of Havelock and Outram amounted to 3,170 men, 2,388 of whom were British infantry; 400 invalids were left behind to man the entrenchment at Kanpur. Havelock in a private letter to his wife of 10 Nov. 1857 gave his numbers at 2,500 (J. C. Marshman, *Memoirs of Sir Henry Havelock*, London, 1876, p. 429).

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and the sacrifice required. The assault on Lucknow cost Havelock more than a fifth of his force, which was left too weak to bring off the besieged garrison. By 7 October, the relieving force, now itself bottled up and besieged in Lucknow, had lost 256 killed and missing and 700 wounded since crossing the Ganges.[30] It was a high price for a garrison which, exclusive of the women and children, had numbered on 1 July some 905 Europeans and 713 Indians fit for duty, and which by 26 September had itself suffered some 300 European and 203 Indian casualties, or roughly a third of its strength.[31] But this was the inevitable toll in this type of action.

Delhi was stormed and taken at the same time at a similar proportionate cost to the assault columns. It left the victorious Delhi Field Force too worn and reduced to send more than a small movable column of some 2,600 men, less than half of whom were European, to sweep down the Doab. After smartly checking the advance of the Indore rebels upon Agra on 10 October, the column was speedily summoned to Kanpur to join with fresh troops gathered there from the China Force, notably the 93rd Highlanders. The joint column under Hope Grant crossed the Ganges on 30 October, but even when they were joined by Colin Campbell after his break-neck dash up-country from Calcutta, they numbered only 4,500. This was sufficient to carve its way to the Residency in Lucknow on 17 November, but after losing 500 officers and men in the ferocious hand-to-hand fighting at the Sikanderabagh and the Shah Najaf mosque, Campbell was left far too weak to drive the enemy from the city or maintain his position within it. He consequently drew off with the small body of European civilians whom it had cost so much to rescue. Outram was left to hold the Alam Bagh and mask the city, while Campbell returned hastily to Kanpur on 29 November, where Tantia Topi and the Gwalior Contingent advancing from Kalpi had driven Windham back into the entrenchment and threatened to capture the bridge of boats across the river.

The conduct of operations at the farthest extremity of a single line of communication running into the heart of the rebellion zone involved considerable risk, or so it was bound to appear to Canning and his Council in Calcutta. While Outram and later Colin Campbell were battling for Lucknow, the telegraph never ceased to flash

[30] Forrest, *State Papers*, ii. 223, 239.
[31] Forrest, *State Papers*, ii. 69, 73.

warnings from those concerned with the security of the flanks. The westward progress of Koer Singh and the Dinapur mutineers from the region of Arrah and Jagdishpur in Shahabad district gave rise to constant anxiety. At the time Outram was proceeding up-country with reinforcements for Havelock at the end of August, the Bihar rebels were making their way in two main groups on a roughly parallel course to the southward. On 14 August one group—composed largely of the 7th and 8th NI—entered Mirzapur district, and on 19 August, as they neared Mirzapur city itself, were engaged by 300 men of HM 5th Fusiliers sent out for the purpose. By 28 August the officer commanding Allahabad reported them as thirty miles to the south-west across the Jumna in the Bara pargana. As Outram entered Allahabad on 1 September, an armed steamer was sent up the Jumna to deter the rebels from crossing over into the Doab, but instead they continued their march westwards until they reached Banda shortly afterwards.[32]

It was Koer Singh, however, a clan head with the power to marry civil with military revolt, who aroused the deepest British fears. With a war band of some 5,000, including about 600 Dinapur sepoys (mainly of the 40th NI) and the mutinied Ramgarh State battalion, he moved across the Mirzapur district in the last week of August until he got astride the Great Deccan Road which connected Mirzapur and Calcutta with Jabbalpur, Nagpur, and Bombay. During the first few days of September he ascended the Kuttra pass into Rewa State; the raja of Rewa confessed himself unable to deal with the double movement of subversion now threatening from within and without, and asked the young British political agent, Osborne, to leave. The effect was to pull an alarm cord that set the warning bells jangling all the way down to Nagpur far to the south. For there were no European troops north of the Narmada river, only wavering sepoy units of the Bengal army at Nagode and Jabbalpur. A Madras column had been sent up from Kampti (the cantonment adjoining Nagpur) and it was hoped that this lacing of Madrasi sepoys would stiffen the doubtful loyalty of the 52nd Bengal NI who held the Jabbalpur area. The country to the west, known as the Saugor and Nerbudda Territories, was already deep

[32] On the movement of the Dinapur rebels, see *NE* i. 42–3; Forrest, *State Papers*, ii. 210–11. Lt.-Col. O'Brien, OC Allahabad to Outram, 17 Sept. 1857, telegram, states Dinapur mutineers reached Banda on 4 Sept.; W. J. Money Papers, MSS Eur. C 124/8, IOL.

in the throes of rebellion. Open mutiny had broken out among the 42nd NI and the 3rd Irregular Cavalry at Sagar on 1 July. Although these marched off to join the Nana Sahib at Kanpur and fought Havelock's men at Bithur in the action of 16 August, the Europeans and loyal sepoys remained penned up in the fort at Sagar and all control over the district was lost. The real problem was rebellion among the petty Bundela *thakurs* or chieftains, spearheaded by the rajas of Banpur and Shahgarh. Having seen British rule collapse in the western portion of his charge, Erskine, the Commissioner for the Territories, had felt it his main duty to prevent rebellion spreading eastwards and southwards. Hence he had gone off to Damoh with the Kampti column, leaving a small but highly nervous European community at Jabbalpur with two companies of the unsteady 52nd NI. If Koer Singh continued his advance through Rewa, it seemed certain that the 50th NI at Nagode and the men of the 52nd at Jabbalpur would join him. As Professor Hira Lal Gupta has described the situation with intriguing ambiguity, 'the consternation among the Europeans was so great that the English ladies always preferred to remain close to their husbands and never removed their trousers even at night'.[33]

In the event, the Rewa raja was induced to give Koer Singh a cold reception, and the old chieftain retired down the pass and made his way with a reduced following to Banda, which he reached on 29 September. Before then, however, the Dinapur sepoys of the 7th and 8th NI, who—it will be recalled—had arrived at Banda at the beginning of the month, had themselves moved south on Nagode. Here as was predicted, the 50th NI rose up and joined them; and on 18 September the 52nd at Jabbalpur at last broke out but quit the station quietly. All in authority were now agreed that if these combined units with their artillery struck south there was no force capable of stopping them and hence no alternative for the British but to pull back completely across the Narmada to the south and attempt to rally upon Nagpur. Begging troops from the Resident at Hyderabad, Plowden, the Commissioner of Nagpur, warned on 22 September 'that a very sudden and unexpected anger seriously

[33] H. L. Gupta, 'The Revolt of 1857 in the Sagar and Narbada Territories', *Journal of Indian History*, xxxvi, pt. 1 (Apr. 1958). The 'Saugor and Nerbudda Territories' comprised at this time the 12 districts of Jalaun, Jhansi, Chanderi, Nagode, Sarar, Damoh, Jabbalpur, Mundlah, Seoni, Narsingpur, Hoshangabad, and Baitul. The first three districts had in practice been separated off under the ill-fated superintendent at Jhansi, Captain Skene.

threatens us, and that we have a very inadequate force of untrustworthy troops at our disposal. It is of great moment to the whole of the south that we should suffer no disaster here . . .'.[34]

These fears that rebellion was about to engulf southern India were not realized. The mutineers collected at Nagode made the fateful decision not to press on southwards but to return north to Banda. Yet as late as 27 October, Erskine was relaying reports that the 5,000 to 6,000 men at Banda intended marching on Sagar and that part of the revolted Gwalior Contingent was also planning to move to Jhansi and from there likewise converge on Sagar. Again the fears proved groundless. Instead part of the Banda force, including the 7th and 8th NI, went north, crossed the Jumna into the Fatehpur district, and from there threatened the main line of British communications on the Grand Trunk Road between Allahabad and Kanpur. Here on 1 November at Khujwa they were engaged by a 500-strong British column detached from the reinforcements moving up to Kanpur and after a close-fought action were driven back across the Jumna into the Banda district.

In the meantime fears of a collapse of the British position south of the Jumna had had their effect. In Rewa the political agent was attempting to keep the raja straight against the counsels of a powerful dissident faction among the nobility. Rewa commanded the road through which supplies and ultimately troops could be obtained from southern India; it had a pivotal role in determining the attitude of the petty Bandelkhand states, and its local strategic position in the rear of the weakly held British districts of Allahabad and Mirzapur could not be ignored. Hence it was decided that a brigade of Madras troops under Colonel Carthew should be pushed up from Mirzapur to Rewa in mid-October to rally the pro-British faction in the state. The column was then to pass on to the Saugor and Nerbudda Territories to stem the spreading tide of revolt which had lapped over the Narmada into the southern parganas of Hoshangabad and Narsingpur. During its progress, the column was to be joined by 200 men of HM 10th Foot coming up from Dinapur. The Madras troops got as far as the Kuttra pass, effecting a marked pro-British shift in the political stance of Rewa, but on 20 October they were summarily recalled and ordered to Kanpur. Colin Campbell

[34] PP 1857–8, xliv, pt. 1, p. 238. Also S. A. Rizvi and M. I. Bhargava (eds.), *History of the Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh* (Lucknow, 1959), (hereafter *FSUP*), iv. 412–30.

had decided that to rescue Outram, Havelock, and the Lucknow garrison, his personal presence was required together with every available man he could lay hands on. J. P. Grant, the Lieutenant-Governor of the hastily improvised government of the Central Provinces, pleaded for some delay in order to consolidate the position in Rewa, but Canning had no doubt where his priorities lay:

> The Governor-General in Council could not in such an exigency have consented to any withholding of troops for purposes which will have no effect at Lucknow . . . [He] desires to say broadly and plainly that he would consider the sacrifice of the garrison in Lucknow as a far greater calamity and reproach to the Government than an outbreak of the Rewah or Bundlecund States, even if followed by rebellion and the temporary loss of our authority in our own territories on the Nerbudda.[35]

The dramatic interest attaching to the relief of Lucknow had caught the imagination of public opinion in Britain and elevated it to an importance out of all proportion to its intrinsic military value. Canning had to follow the tide in this respect, but although he might be prepared to take risks at this stage in central India, there was no question of him doing so in Bengal and Bihar.

The vulnerability of the northern flank of the Grand Trunk Road was from this standpoint of immediate concern. In the key section between Allahabad and Kanpur the road ran through the narrow neck of the Doab. Although rebellion raged north of the Ganges in Oudh and south of the Jumna in Banda, the two rivers proved formidable obstacles across which to mount offensive operations against the British, as the rebel defeats by Vincent Eyre on the Ganges in September and by Captain Peel (son of the late prime minister) at Khujwa on 1 November amply demonstrated. Between Benares and the bridge of boats at Allahabad there was, however, no such natural protective barrier, for here the road ran north of the Ganges. British troops had shouldered their way brutally past hostile villages bordering this section of the road in June, and by August things were sufficiently pacified for the authorities to collect the June instalment of the land revenue from much of the northern pargana of the Allahabad district. Havelock's enforced retirement back across the Ganges into Kanpur on 13 August was, however, the signal for fresh turbulence. Not only did it consolidate and

[35] G.-G. in C. to Lt.-Gov. Central Provs., 30 Oct. 1857; PP 1857–8, xliv, pt. 2., p. 329.

extend rebellion among the *taluqdars* of Oudh, but it gave a renewed stimulus to those on the eastern border 'to take possession of those Pergunnahs of Allahabad, over which they formerly ruled' when these belonged to Oudh in the eighteenth century.[36] Their encroachment, though gradual, enveloped the north-west corner of the Allahabad district, and by the end of September 1857 was endangering the Trunk Road.

Despite the urging of the local officials at Allahabad, Calcutta refused permission to employ part of the small garrisons of either Allahabad or Fatehpur in local clearing operations. Instead reliance was placed on the Gurkha force based on Jaunpur which had been loaned by Nepal and had made its painfully slow way southward. Allahabad's local security difficulties were in fact but part of the much larger problem of the whole eastern boundary of the rebellion zone to the north of the Ganges. The British hold on the eastern region of the North-Western Provinces had been tenuous since the first outbreaks of mutiny in early June, when the 17th NI had gone up at Jaunpur and Azamgarh and a detachment of the same regiment had continued to serve on in an increasingly mutinous mood at Gorakhpur to the north. Jaunpur had remained abandoned but Azamgarh was reoccupied on 16 June by Venables, a European planter. Both at Gorakhpur and Azamgarh, the British just managed to keep their head above water in a sea of disturbance and rebellion around them and were safe so long as they did not come under serious attack from trained sepoys or *taluqdars'* forces. In late July it seemed as though the approach of the Gurkha brigade loaned by Nepal would strengthen the British position considerably, but its arrival at Gorakhpur coincided with the fresh upsurge of rebellion in western Bihar. Immediately following the Dinapur outbreak on 26 July, the 12th Irregular Cavalry rose at Sagauli in Saran district and slaughtered their officers. Azamgarh, which depended on a detachment of the 12th Irregulars, was at once abandoned and so temporarily was Chapra, the headquarters of Saran district. Even more strikingly, rebellion was so encouraged by these events in the huge Gorakhpur district that despite the Gurkha force at their disposal, the British officials decided to abandon it on 13 August and fall back south of the Ghagara (Gogra) river with the Gurkhas. The consequence was that Muhammad Hasan took over the

[36] F. O. Mayne to Commissioner of Allahabad, 24 Sept. 1857; PP 1857–8, xliv, pt. 2, p. 389.

Gorakhpur district on behalf of the rebel Oudh regime and carried the frontier of rebellion eastward to the Gandak river.

The newly appointed Lieutenant-Governor of the temporarily constituted Central Provinces, J. P. Grant, fulminated at the wanton manner in which Charles Wingfield, the political adviser with the Gurkha force, had wantonly exposed the northern Bihar districts on the mistaken notion that the whole Gurkha force ought to be concentrated at Allahabad to feed Havelock's fighting line.

> It is thought by Government of immense importance to protect our Central Province districts north of the Ganges for if these are abandoned to insurgents and invaders from Oude the Bengal Districts behind them, in which we have not a fighting man, will follow one after another, and the loss will be infinite. . . . This line extends from Oude to Rungpore, and includes the rich indigo districts of Saran, Tirhoot and Purneah. The line is as easily defended at its Oude end as elsewhere, and at that end are the 3,000 Gurkhas expressly for the purpose. Although the necessity is greatly to be regretted, yet it seems to me that the necessity is obvious of saving all this fine country even although to do so may somewhat weaken the next Allahabad Column or delay it.[37]

Outram had already seen the military need to push up all available troops to Havelock at Kanpur, even before Colin Campbell had passed on to him Havelock's ultimatum of 22 August threatening to fall back from Kanpur unless speedily reinforced. On 20 August Outram had brushed aside the pleas of Samuells, the Commissioner of the Patna division, to retain a force at Sasseram, in order to protect the Arrah (Shahabad) district and its opium crop worth half a million sterling.[38] But he accepted Grant's argument for retaining the Gurkha force and using it to reinforce the desperately weak position of the British south of the Ghagara.

The arrival of the Gurkhas, moving with their wives and baggage train at a mere six mile a day, was an important local accession of strength to the British, and restored the defensive arc protecting Benares. Not only was Azamgarh reoccupied on 26 August, but Jaunpur, abandoned since 6 June, was recovered on 8 September and now became the point from which the 2,400-strong Gurkha

[37] J. P. Grant to Outram, Patna, 20 Aug. 1857; W. J. Money Papers, MSS Eur. C 124, IOL.

[38] Memo. for Gen. Sir Jas. Outram on Patna Division, by E. Samuells, 8 Aug. 1857, with Outram's scribbled marginalia incorporated in letter to supreme Government, 20 Aug. 1857; W. J. Money Papers, MSS Eur. C 124, IOL.

force conducted operations. They were to be sorely stretched. At the beginning of October they were summoned to the Allahabad district to deal with the threat to the Grand Trunk Road, but were quickly recalled in the middle of the month on the news that a serious invasion from Oudh was in the offing. It was inevitable that the blows aimed by the British at Lucknow would have something of the effect of punching a pillow in the middle. While giving at the centre, the pillow threatened to burst out at the extremities. In continuing to approach Lucknow by the roundabout route through Kanpur, the British had flaunted the most elementary laws of strategy and at the very least invited a diversionary attack on their enormously long and exposed flank. At one stage the authorities at Benares had persuaded Outram to guard against this danger by making his own approach to Lucknow along the direct route from Benares through Jaunpur; and it was only when he discovered the extent of Havelock's predicament and the fewness of the troops available for composing his own force that he decided to proceed up the Grand Trunk Road and reinforce Havelock at Kanpur.[39] So the danger remained. By mid-October intelligence reports confirmed that 'a great and increasing fermentation is going on among the [Oudh] chiefs beyond the border', and that 'it would seem an immediate invasion in force of Jounpore and Azimghur is seriously contemplated'.[40] J. P. Grant made a strong bid to divert troops to deal with the threat, questioning the strategy of pushing up all reinforcements to Kanpur:

> . . . it is a point for consideration, how much longer it will be otherwise than imprudent in the extreme, to continue to send the whole of the daily arrivals of Europeans nearly half-way round the province of Oude, in order to create pressure upon the rear of the mutineers and insurgents of the province from the direction of Cawnpore and Lucknow, whilst our home districts are thus left open to them in their front.[41]

Grant also suggested that any force to be assembled for the reconquest of Oudh and Rohilkhand should be concentrated at Benares and then moved upon Lucknow by the direct route, as Outram had originally proposed.

Grant's urging took effect. Calcutta was not prepared to listen to him over the need to detain troops in Bandelkhand, but Canning

[39] Sir F. J. Goldsmid, *Sir James Outram, a biography* (London, 1881), ii. 201–8.
[40] Govt. of Central Provinces to Supreme Govt., 15 Oct. 1857, PP 1857–8, xliv, pt. 2, p. 315.
[41] *Idem*, p. 316.

responded immediately when it was a question of the security of Benares and Bihar. Orders were given for 320 men of the 10th Queen's and 170 men of the 17th Madras Native Infantry to be diverted and placed at the Lieutenant-Governor's disposal. Before these measures could take effect, the Gurkhas fought a minor action on 19 October at Khudua near Singramau on the Jaunpur border, and a more serious affair on 31 October at Chanda a few miles beyond where they engaged Muhammad Yar Khan, the Oudh *chakladar* (revenue officer), and his force of some 5,000 men with five guns. Despite these Gurkha victories, the British were sensible of their continuing weakness in the area. At the beginning of November, two of the northern parganas of the Azamgarh district were overrun by a force from Oudh, the Gurkha detachment in the district proving too weak to repel it; and at the same time there were fresh incursions to within four miles of the Trunk Road near Allahabad. On 8 November, J. P. Grant gloomily outlined the difficulties and concluded that 'as it now appears that neither Colonel Puhlwan Singh's [Gurkha] force in Jounpore, nor the Goorkha force in Azimghur, is able, without European support, to meet in the field a large invading force, such as is now expected, the defence of this frontier line can no longer be relied upon'.[42] Like every local commander made desperate in his endeavours to secure reinforcements, Grant produced the *ultima ratio*—the threat of 'the abandonment of our districts north of the Ganges, as far south as the mouth of the Gogra', or in other words, the relinquishment of the protecting arc provided by the occupation of Jaunpur and Azamgarh and a retreat to the Ganges river line and its towns, Benares and Ghazipur.

It is extraordinary to find as late as the end of November 1857, with the Hughli crammed with troopships from Europe, with Delhi long since recovered and Lucknow on the point of relief by Colin Campbell, that Canning should still be prey to anxiety because of the distorted strategy which the rescue of Europeans from the heart of the rebellion zone had enforced. On 22 November he wrote to Lord Elphinstone, Governor of Bombay, expressing his fears in the course of a survey of the whole situation, including the troubled condition of Bandelkhand and the territories on the Narmada:

[42] Secy. to Govt. Central Provinces to Govt. of India, 8 Nov. 1857; PP 1857–58, xliv, pt. 3, p. 890.

You see that taking Allahabad, or thereabouts, as a centre, we have at distances varying from 50 to 150 miles an almost continuous circle of active enemies, fighting in real earnest, and, although I do not believe in any system or cooperation amongst them, pressing upon us all at the same time . . . The importance of crushing and scattering this concentration of revolt is great in itself, but is tenfold greater when its proximity to Behar and Bengal is borne in mind. Hitherto the flame in Bengal has been stamped out pretty nearly as soon as it has shown itself; but if it were to burst upon Bengal from Oude and the Central Provinces simultaneously it would very soon be beyond control.[43]

To allay these anxieties Canning now made sure that more substantial numbers of European troops were diverted from the reinforcements passing up to Kanpur. On 29 November General Franks was appointed to command the forces in the Azamgarh and Jaunpur districts, and provided with some 2,300 British troops and 3,200 Gurkhas loaned from Nepal. 'Franks was officially informed that his main duties would consist in protecting Banaras against attack, in preventing the rebels from crossing the Ganges into Bihar, in recovering the British districts occupied by them. It was at the same time impressed upon him, in a memorandum [of Canning, dated 29 November 1857, and addressed directly to Franks] that the safety of Banaras was the prime, the main consideration, to which every other was to be subordinated.'[44]

Having brought away the besieged garrison from Lucknow, left a masking force under Outram at the Alambagh outside, and withdrawn the remainder of the troops to Kanpur in the last days of November, Colin Campbell had little difficulty in driving Tantia Topi back to Kalpi on the Jumna and then clearing the Doab. He coupled these operations with the crushing of the rebel regime at Farukhabad and the recovery of its river fort at Fatehgarh on 3 January 1858. Even before this, on 22 December, he had unfolded his plans for future operations. Campbell had grown ultra-cautious. Now that the position was no longer critical, he would not risk a fall. His estimate of the force required to effect the permanent capture of Lucknow and subjugate Oudh was no less than 30,000 men. To assemble an army of anything approaching this size would mean denuding the Doab and risking its invasion from the unsubdued

[43] Canning to Elphinstone, 22 Nov. 1857; Elphinstone Papers, MSS Eur. F 87, Box 16, IOL.

[44] G. B. Malleson and J. W. Kaye, *History of the Indian Mutiny*, vol. iv (London, 1888), p. 228.

rebel regions north of the Ganges and south of the Jumna. It would thus mean imperilling the security of through communication along the Grand Trunk Road, to which Campbell gave the highest priority since it made available the resources of the Punjab. He was therefore in favour of spending the remaining months before the hot weather in reconquering the flanking regions which did not present so formidable a military problem, namely Rohilkhand and Bandelkhand. The decisive campaign against Lucknow and the final subjugation of Oudh would be put off until the next cold season at the end of 1858. Canning felt bound to overrule him. In political terms, the rebellion had been read not only in Europe but in India as a struggle for the recovery of Delhi and Lucknow. It was of paramount importance to decapitate the head of rebellion at Lucknow even if the rest of Oudh could not be immediately subdued. But the more local objective of ensuring the security of Benares and the lower provinces was never far from his mind. A direct advance upon Lucknow launched from Benares—the idea so sedulously advocated by J. P. Grant and by Tucker, the Commissioner of Benares—would kill two birds with one stone.[45]

So it was decided, and the plan went ponderously into operation. Campbell assembled the *corps d'armée* at Kanpur and the Alambagh. The elaborate arrangements were not complete until the second half of February 1858 and the convergence of the triple force upon Lucknow set in motion. Jang Bahadur, the virtual ruler of Nepal, with 9,000 Gurkhas, advanced slowly through Gorakhpur and Faizabad to the rendezvous, while General Franks with 6,000 troops, half of whom were Gurkha, struck in from the Jaunpur frontier, defeated the *nazim* (governor), Mehndi Hasan, at Chanda on 19 February, and joined Campbell outside Lucknow on 5 March. When at length Jang Bahadur arrived on 11 March, Campbell

[45] The formal correspondence between Campbell and Canning on the scope of future operations is reproduced in L. Shadwell, *The Life of Colin Campbell, Lord Clyde* (Edinburgh, 1881), ii. 63–91. Canning's concern for the Benares region comes out in his letter of 29 Dec. 1857, *idem*, pp. 75–6. 'If the rebels in Oudh are left to themselves, it is almost certain that they will become aggressive, and trouble the Central Provinces. It is quite certain that we shall have to employ a considerable force as a cordon to keep them from aggression—larger probably than would be necessary after dealing them a heavy blow in the heart of the province . . . If Lucknow be retaken and held, order established immediately around it, and the communications with Cawnpore kept open and safe, I should care comparatively little for the congregating rebels in the western part of the province and beyond the Gogra . . . .'

disposed of a combined army of 31,000, 'not a man too many', according to Roberts's later judgement, 'for the capture of a city twenty miles in circumference, defended by 120,000 armed men, who for three months and a half had worked incessantly as strengthening the defences . . .'.[46] Now that victory was sure, Campbell was anxious to avoid casualties and keep his reputation unblemished. But his tactics were responsible for emptying the large rebel force into the countryside rather than encircling and destroying them. By 22 March he had taken the city and wiped out the last opposition but he had scattered the hot coals of rebellion far and wide. A long mopping-up campaign remained that extended beyond Oudh, and Canning's plan to give final tranquillity to the Benares region back-fired in his face. One of the forces escaping from Lucknow was Koer Singh and his followers, who now proceeded to drive straight through the thin screen left to protect the eastern Oudh frontier. The British failed to stop their progress through the Azamgarh and Ghaziabad districts and prevent them reaching their home territory south of the Ganges in the Bihar district of Shahabad. Here, in the jungle-clad hills, they kept rebellion alive for the remainder of the year.

While Campbell was moving upon Lucknow the movement for recovery of central India was already in train. When he arrived in India in mid-August 1857, he had drawn up a rough strategic plan to concert his own operations in the Ganges valley with those aimed at the reconquest of central India. The former Agent to the Governor-General in central India, Sir Robert Hamilton, had arrived in Calcutta at the same time, and was called on for a memorandum setting out his views on what was needed to restore tranquillity to the area. In September Campbell and his chief of staff, William Mansfield, 'went over the whole plan, with the map on the table, which was that, by a combined operation, the whole of the country between Jubbulpore and Indore, Mhow as a base, and the Jumna, should be swept by the two forces to be employed, Calpee and Banda being the two points on which they were to act'.[47] The aim was for the

[46] Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, p. 220. The passage is so similar to one in Sir H. Grant, *Incidents of the Sepoy War, 1857–8* (Edinburgh, 1873), p. 243, that it was almost certainly based upon it. Hope Grant, who liked to dress out his figures of enemy opposition to advantage, was never one to underestimate, but even he could record only 30,000 sepoys and 50,000 volunteers comprising the rebel force at Lucknow.

[47] Memorandum of Sir W. C. Hamilton, 20 Mar. 1862; cited Forrest, *State Papers*, iv. lxxxxix.

twin thrust from Jabbalpur and Mhow to reach the Jumna by 1 May, and there link up with Campbell's army. The plan was later modified to allow part of the force gathered at Mhow to proceed through part of Rajputana.[48] Sir Hugh Rose was not ready to move off from Mhow on his main task until January 1858, and even then, because of the delay to Whitlock's Madras brigade in setting out from Jabbalpur, Rose had at first to move to the relief of Sagar, which was not accomplished until early February 1858. The main expedition northward did not, therefore, take place until the same time as Campbell had amassed his forces for the final recovery of Lucknow. Yet the delay did not alter the final timetable. Rose's Central India Field Force encountered few serious difficulties. By the time Campbell was clearing the last opposition from Lucknow, Rose arrived before Jhansi and opened the siege. Interrupting his operations to attack and disperse a relieving force under Tantia Topi, he took the town by assault on 3 April. The advance beyond Jhansi was a more gruelling affair for the worn and sunstricken troops; even so, when they fought their way into Kalpi on the Jumna to link up with Campbell's army on 23 May they were only three weeks behind the date fixed for the rendezvous in the previous September. With Whitlock already in occupation of Banda, and Bareilly, the heart of rebel Rohilkhand, recovered in the first week of May, all important centres were back under British control and the major campaigns seemed completed. Then on 1 June the fleeing rebel leaders, the Rao Sahib, Tantia Topi, and the Rani of Jhansi, seized Gwalior. It proved a dying flicker; Rose responded with promptitude, and on 20 June Gwalior's majestic rock-citadel was in his hands. The war of rebellion was over; the task of pacification alone remained.

Once the British had at length assembled sufficient forces and the field armies had been set in motion from early 1858 there was no question as to the outcome. The criticism has been advanced that the operations carried on in the interval—between the outbreak in May 1857 and the effective concentration of reinforcements from England and the Punjab in January 1858—were futile and wasteful. The British would have done better to have cordoned off the zone of rebellion instead of attempting to penetrate it with inadequate

[48] Canning to Lord Elphinstone, 22 Nov. 1857, Elphinstone Papers, MSS Eur. F 87, Box 8c/16, IOL.

force. The weighty authority of Fortescue in his *History of the British Army* has castigated the misuse of scarce military resources. The operations at Delhi and Lucknow had flouted, he declared, the 'one principle in warfare, which though constantly transgressed . . . remains eternally true; namely, that to send forth a weak army and reinforce it by driblets is to ensure for it the greatest possible wastage and the least possible power'.[49] It was a criticism voiced at the time by those who felt it necessary to put the Punjab or Bengal first. Edwards had urged it vehemently upon Lawrence, and at the beginning of August 1857 when the Dinapur crisis suddenly stopped all further reinforcement of Havelock at Kanpur, J. P. Dorin, a member of Canning's Council at Calcutta, had also propounded the ring-fence strategy:

> I think it very doubtful whether we shall be able to hold the Cawnpore Division and at the same time provide for the tranquillity of our richest Bengal districts. I shall be quite prepared to find it necessary to withdraw our troops as low as Allahabad, and to endeavour to maintain the provinces of Bengal and Behar in security till reinforcements arrive from England . . . Our handful of European troops is totally unequal to attempt extensive operations and it seems to me wiser to endeavour to hold the country of which we are reasonably sure than to risk the loss of the whole by wasting our force at distant points which in our present weak position is of very little practical value.[50]

It proved morally and politically impossible to leave the Lucknow garrison to its fate, and J. P. Dorin's view did not prevail. Yet it remained powerful. Canning, we have seen, was much affected by it and it influenced the disposal of the regiments arriving piecemeal from England after October 1857. A compromise resulted that in practice shaped the configuration and determined the life-span of the rebellion. For the compromise led to division of the available British force and denied it the power of concentration. It meant that only weak movable columns could be deployed against the main centres of revolt, which were thus able to sustain themselves until a full field army could be brought against them. The recovery of Delhi was a remarkable feat mounted from the one region from which something approaching the strength of a small field army could be raised, but the city's capture dispersed rather than destroyed the mutineers. Rebellion could not be suppressed

[49] Fortescue, *History of the British Army*, xiii. 275.
[50] Minute of J. P. Dorin, 3 Aug. 1857; Forrest, *State Papers*, ii. 169–70.

until the main reinforcements from Britain were deployed up-country in the early months of 1858. Yet the sustained British operations against Delhi and Lucknow during 1857, though conducted with inadequate force, reinforced the tendency of the sepoys to bunch at these places, ensured that rebellion was inward-looking, and helped to isolate sepoy action from rural revolt. The timing of the British military response also stamped itself on the internal evolution of rebellion. The British alone possessed the capacity to act on an all-India scale; they alone possessed a central organizational mind and will, a properly functioning bureaucracy, and the telegraph to communicate their purposes. Once the uprising failed to be translated from a provincial to a continental level, there was no avoiding the fact that it was British action that imposed the unities of time and place upon the drama the sepoys had begun.

2

THE MILITARY DIMENSION: THE SEPOY REBELS

British counteraction skewed the military shape of rebellion. But there were other contributory reasons why it rapidly turned involute. In the absence of local support and in the presence of countervailing British force, it was to be expected that sepoy units which mutinied far off in the Punjab or Bengal would attempt to make their way back towards the main rebellion zone in the North-Western Provinces and link up with their brethren. Yet this rally upon the centre, though it had its own logic, was carried to destructive lengths. Almost every mutinied regiment, even in the main rebellion zone itself, responded to the centripetal impulse to congregate at Delhi, although some were diverted from their purpose and became caught up with the subordinate centres of revolt. The result was to deprive rebellion of its expansive proclivities. It came to function by forced draught. The circle of fire was capable of only limited outward extension since the combustible materials were sucked inwards into the central column of flame; or, as it appeared to a contemporary Englishman, the seat of the uprising was like a volcano crater whose sides were constantly crumbling inwards. There is little doubt that the sudden upsurge of full-scale political rebellion took both sides by surprise. Isolated mutiny had long been anticipated, so endemic had been troubles over pay and allowances, now fearfully compounded from the beginning of 1857 by the grievance over greased cartridges. But the seizure of Delhi was for all a thunderbolt from the gods. For the mutinied sepoys, however dumbfounded, it was a stroke that gave them all the advantages of planned surprise. It established for them a vital time lead. At least until late September 1857 their rate of military build-up could outpace the British, and not until February 1858 did they have to confront British field armies possessing a crushing superiority. It was this time advantage that the rebel strategy of concentration cast away. Not merely did such a strategy surrender the initiative but it also forfeited the option of a war of movement at the most

opportune hour. When by March 1858 the rebels had been unseated from Delhi and Lucknow, the dying struggles of rebellion showed what a war of movement might have accomplished. Koer Singh was able to carve his way out of Oudh into the districts of Azamgarh and Ghazipur, his followers reaching their home district of Shahabad and lighting a torch of rebellion in western Bihar that it took the British a year to put out. Tantia Topi, uprooted from his base on the Jumna at Kalpi, swooped upon Gwalior in June 1858, and then, pursued by the British, ranged circuitously through central India until by late October he was across the Narmada and heading for Nagpur. But these were the forlorn hopes of desperate men for whom time had long since run out. Even then they were the civil leaders of rebellion and not the generals of the sepoy mutineers. The regiments which 'went up' when revolt was in its prime all bent their steps to the rear in order to congregate with their *bhai* (brethren), and so left untested the possibilities of advancing down the Ganges towards Calcutta or south across the Narmada on the road to Bombay.

Their action was not as purblind as might appear. It reflected an intuitive and realistic assessment of their own imperfect leadership, cohesiveness, and fighting capacity. Mutiny might not have been unpremeditated, but it was unplanned. The cry of *'Chalo Delhi!'* ('Onwards to Delhi!') formed a rallying call which by striking out a common aim gave an immediate loose-knit unity to excited and distracted men. It is not to be supposed that mutiny simply removed the white officers of a regiment and left it otherwise entire as a working formation. There were few units where this degree of unanimity obtained. For the most part, mutiny required a successful internal insurrection beforehand within the rank and file. This was usually the work of a small minority playing upon the hopes and fears of their fellows. And fear was always a more powerful spur to action than hope or greed. Fear for loss of caste was unquestionably the most common sentiment among the sepoys, but apprehension of defilement in a purely religious sense was not at the root of this sentiment, as was to be seen when later sepoys cheerfully used the Enfield rifle. Loss of caste denoted rather loss of that superior civil status by which *ashraf* (respectable) Muslims, Brahmins, Rajputs, and all who aspired to Rajput status, had traditionally secured a near monopoly over entry into the Bengal army. If the British were to be allowed to enforce practices demeaning to

the higher castes, the respectability of the military profession and their quasi-monopoly over it were gone. The British had already given clear indications that they were contemplating the transformation of the loosely disciplined mercenary army that had survived since the time of Clive into a modern force yielding unhesitating obedience and prepared to serve anywhere it was ordered. Prompted by the difficulties of garrisoning Lower Burma, the General Service Enlistment Order of August 1856 ended—at least for new recruits—the Bengal Army's privilege of not being required to serve overseas except on a voluntary basis. Canning dismissed objections entertained by the higher castes to crossing the 'black water'. No such privilege had been allowed in the Madras and Bombay armies, although, as he observed, 'the Bombay army is recruited in great part from the same classes and districts in Bengal, and even in the latter the best Brahmin in the ranks does not scruple to set aside his prejudices whenever it suits him to do so'.[1]

This scarcely did justice to the delicacy of the position. The low pay drawn by the sepoy (of Rs. 7 to Rs. 9 per month, out of which he had to pay for his food, uniform, and transport of his private baggage) was an indication that he was driven to serve by strong pressure from his domestic situation. The Bengal army, or at least its infantry arm, was principally recruited from a limited number of districts in southern Oudh, the eastern part of the North-Western Provinces, and western Bihar, where Brahmins and Rajputs formed swollen proprietary brotherhoods of petty landholders.[2] Military service was often the only honourable escape for men from families whose 'ownership' of land had failed to keep pace with growing numbers, and who were steadily being forced down into the position of the humbler tillers of the soil. Like all distressed gentlefolk, the attribute of gentility was their last economic asset. If forced as far afield as Bombay or even Madras, the Brahmin and Rajput might swallow their pride to serve alongside men of inferior social status, but this in no way lessened the desire to retain their monopolistic grip on the Bengal regiments.

That monopoly was being steadily eroded. In 1849, when a wave of mutinous discontent swept through the Bengal regiments in the Punjab because of the withdrawal of wartime *batta* allowances, Sir Charles Napier, as Commander-in-Chief, had made a stern example

[1] Canning to Vernon Smith, 9 Aug. 1856; Canning Papers.
[2] Evidence of Sir J. Nicolls, 23 Feb. 1832; PP 1831–2, xii. 23.

of the 66th NI. The regiment was disbanded and its colours given to the Nasiri Gurkha battalion in order to demonstrate to the Brahmins, as Napier declared, 'that the Gurkhas, another race, could be brought into the ranks of the Company's Army—a race dreaded as more warlike than their own'.[3] After the annexation of the Punjab in 1848, the British pressed steadily ahead with recruiting Punjabi troops, although the conquest of the Sikhs was too recent to allow them to be employed other than in irregular corps. In 1857, there were some 23,000 Punjabi troops compared with 42,000 'Hindustani' serving in the Punjab. While chary of employing Sikhs in the Punjab, the British quickly recognized their value for service outside. In 1857, Rattray's Sikhs were serving in Lower Bengal as a police battalion on internal security duties. In Benares there was the irregular Sikh regiment of Ludhiana and at Mirzapur that of Firozpur. Still more ominous was the permission given to recruit up to 200 Punjabis into the ordinary regular infantry regiment of 1,000 men. High-caste monopoly had never been complete even here, and other Hindu castes supplied something like one-fifth of the rank and file, while Muslims might number a sixth. Unity of action could be seriously affected by any dilution of the high-caste element, and it has been suggested that this may have been the reason why Mangal Pande was not supported by his comrades when he sought to raise the 34th NI at Barrackpore on 29 March 1857—the precursor to the May outbreak at Meerut.[4] The 'closed shop' of the *Purbias* (easterners) of the middle Ganges was under obvious threat, and with it all those privileges of 'home service' and a certain independent negotiating power characteristic of mercenary armies.

Hence solid material fears underlay the apprehension over any infringement of caste rules by British authority. Yet that did not mean that the excitement which swept the Bengal army was rationally grounded. When it is observed how wildly susceptible to rumour and panic the European community showed itself at Agra, Calcutta, or Bombay, the misconceptions of the sepoys are readily intelligible. The collapse of a reliable news service was part of the collapse of the established external order that gave men their sense of psychological security. The sepoys had always depended more

[3] Cited Kaye, *Sepoy War*, i. 315.

[4] J. A. B. Palmer, *The Mutiny Outbreak at Meerut in 1857* (Cambridge, 1966), p. 30.

upon their own oral means of communication which so mystified the Europeans on occasion by their uncanny speed and accuracy, but these means were peculiarly liable to distortion in times of excitement, as was to be demonstrated by the impositions practised upon their credulity by the proclamations put out by the rebel leaders.[5] The sepoys were forced to choose between two dominant emotions: to give way to their general sense of grievance and genuine fear over the greased cartridges, or to obtain psychological security by remaining faithful to their 'salt'. Hence their conduct often appeared wildly contradictory, on one day, like the 6th NI at Allahabad, swearing fealty to the British and petitioning to be led against their mutinous brethren at Delhi, and on the next day, rising up and massacring their officers. Mutiny offered a way out of almost intolerable tension; with the *angrezi raj* (English rule) visibly failing, the temptation to escape from the white man's orders and seize the lakhs of glittering rupees in the district treasuries increased hourly. Yet of all motives to mutiny fear of retribution seems to have been the strongest.

It was a fear all the greater because of its very uncertainty. Slackness of discipline, traditional usage, and compassionate consideration by commanding officers for the susceptibilities of their men had led to a system of discussion and negotiation reminiscent of a highly respectful form of trade union bargaining. Such negotiation was conducted with the native commissioned officers acting more as intermediaries than principals. When the voicing of grievances verged upon open disobedience, a dangerous area of uncertainty was exposed. The British authorities could swing suddenly from the extreme of conciliation to the harshest of penalties. The fear produced by such uncertainty was early at work. In the initial outbreak of Meerut, after the 85 troopers of the 3rd Light Cavalry had been ignominiously discharged and lodged like convicts in the gaol, it was the alarm provoked by the report that European troops were on their way to take the native magazines as a preliminary to meting out further punishment which caused the men of the 20th NI to seize their arms and fly into mutiny.[6] Once news of the Meerut outbreak got abroad the fear among the native regiments at other stations was enormously heightened. Brigadier Sibbald reported from Bareilly on 23 May that 'the troops [were] laboring [*sic*] under

[5] For examples of such proclamations, *FSUP* i. 438 ff.
[6] Palmer, *Mutiny Outbreak*, pp. 71 ff. *NE* i. 251, 306, 312.

a great depression of spirits caused by the fear of some heavy punishment they imagined Government was about to inflict upon them'. Addressing them on parade, he 'begged them to dismiss from their minds the causeless dread that pervaded them'.[7]

Yet this fear was manipulated by designing men. Mutiny required ringleaders and these usually comprised a small faction in each regiment which cut across the normal distinctions of caste and rank. Their agitation inevitably caused internal division; hence the apparently inexplicable veering from effusive loyalty to open revolt, as the mutinous faction was temporarily suppressed and then rose into the ascendant. Such a group of plotters, it has been suggested, was behind the disturbances among the 19th NI at Berhampur on 26 February 1857 and Mangal Pande's outburst in the 34th NI at Barrackpore on 29 March. The false alarm at Meerut that European troops were on their way has also been attributed to some such group. The activists sought not merely to foment a state of excitement but to commit a regiment irretrievably to mutiny by the action of one of their number opening fire on the European officers. The importance of shedding white man's blood was not merely that it released men from the awe and respect in which they had been trained to regard their officers, but that it automatically stained a whole regiment as guilty and marked it down for destruction by the nearest European force.[8] The fear of a terrible retribution could thus commit an entire unit to mutiny, to which only a few had originally set their hand.[9]

Yet there was no unanimity of wider purpose. Even at Meerut among the 3rd Light Cavalry, burning with a sense of wrong over the treatment of their 85 skirmishers, there were still to be found

[7] Brig. H. Sibbald, Cmdg. Rohilkhand to Milit. Secr. Govt. of India, 23 May 1857; India Milit. Progs., 5 June 1857, No. 241.

[8] Cf. Sita Ram, *From Sepoy to Subadar*, transl. Lt.-Col. T. Norgate and D. C. Phillott (Calcutta, 1911), p. 124. The same tactics were used to commit Bahadur Shah and the Delhi royal family to rebellion when the 50 European prisoners were slaughtered in their presence in the Red Fort; cf. Narrative of Sayyid Mubarak Shah (MS Eur. B 138, IOL), printed *in extenso* in Michael Edwardes, *Red Year: The Indian Rebellion of 1857* (London, 1973).

[9] Cf. J. G. Medley, *A Year's Campaigning in India from March 1857 to March 1858* (London, 1859), p. 34, on what 'an intelligent native officer (a Poorbeah Brahmin) said to me as to the cause of the Mutinies: "Sir, there is one knave and nine fools; the knave compromises the others, and then tells them it is too late to draw back; they either actively join or run away for fear of the European's vengeance"'.

some 70–80 troopers who remained staunch to their officers.[10] The remainder of the regiment which rode away did not all make for Delhi. Some proceeded to their villages in Oudh and elsewhere. One of the patrolling parties sent out by Alan Octavian Hume (a later founder of the Indian National Congress) arrested seven of them on 16 May outside Etawah where he was the district magistrate, and on 19 May he engaged another group; later Havelock identified 3rd Light Cavalry troopers among the force opposing him outside Fatehpur on 12 July.[11] Among the 11th NI at Meerut there was still greater hesitancy about mutinying, and 125 of those who made off into the night on 10 May returned to Meerut and continued to render faithful service to the British. Even when no remnant remained on the British side, numbers of men simply left for their homes, having no stomach for fighting in the ranks of rebellion. Although the outbreak of the 6th NI at Allahabad, within hours of cheering the Governor-General's message of congratulation on their loyalty, made them guilty in British eyes of 'one of the most deliberate and cold-blooded pieces of treachery perhaps ever planned', the regiment immediately disintegrated. After raiding the treasury, the great majority made off next day for their villages, while the remainder formed themselves into two groups, one of which made for Banda while the other went to join the Kanpur mutineers who under the Nana's titular leadership were attacking Wheeler's ill-starred entrenchment.[12]

Among committed mutineers the problem of re-establishing discipline and internal order within a unit could remain formidable. Usually the mutinous faction was composed of men from the ranks. However much some of the native officers connived at disaffection or clandestinely abetted it, they were too circumspect to

[10] F. Williams stated, 'Altogether about 80 or 90 men of this regiment remained throughout staunch'; *NE* i. 253.

[11] For the movements of the 3rd LC see Palmer, *Mutiny Outbreak*, A. O. Hume, *NE* i. 168. Forrest supposed that Havelock was mistaken in thinking 3rd LC troopers were among the force opposing him at Fatehpur: Forrest, *State Papers*, ii. 87 n. But there is good reason to think he was correct, since Macnaghten, the assistant magistrate of Fatehpur, stated, 'it was well known that many of the 3rd Cavalry were residents of Kotli' (*NE* iA, Narrative for Allahabad Division, App. 3, p.5). This may be a misprint for Koth or Kot, known to be populated by a mass of needy Pathan landholders.

[12] For 6th NI see G. H. D. Gimlete, *A Postscript to the Records of the Indian Mutiny* (London, 1927), pp. 85–6; *FSUP* iv. 553–5; *NE* i. 1 ff.; *NE* iA, Narrative of Events for Allahabad Division, by E. C. Bayley, para. 18.

appear as ringleaders, and the great majority were probably reluctant converts. The men who emerged as the open instigators of disobedience in the 3rd Light Cavalry at Meerut were two *naiks* (corporals); at Bareilly it was a regimental barber and an ordinary Rajput sepoy who stood out as leaders in the attack on the gaol and in commanding parties to hunt down Europeans. At Shahjahanpur the mutiny was started by some six or seven sepoys going to the church and slaughtering the Europeans attending service inside. As happened when men of the 6th NI at Allahabad sought out Captain Gordon to murder him, they included no native commissioned or non-commissioned officer and were drawn from at least four different companies within the regiment.[13] Doubtless once a unit had committed itself beyond recall many of the native officers were then willing to exercise command and accept promotion, but by then the revolutionary element had been given its head and the normal subordination of ranks could never be fully restored.

At Kanpur three native infantry regiments (1st, 53rd, and 56th NI) and a native cavalry regiment (2nd LC) rose in mutiny and agreed to collaborate with the Nana Sahib in the attack on the European entrenchment. Joined by the 17th NI from Azamgarh, and by the gunners of the 3rd Battery of the Oudh Irregular Artillery from Naugaon (Nowgong) and an ample artillery park, the force looked strong on paper. Yet the heart had been torn out of their regimental organization. If Jemadar Durga Prasad Misra of the 56th NI is to be believed, all the native officers of his regiment at Kanpur with one exception were on furlough at the time of the outbreak; 'on the Regiment mutinying Havildar Major Annundeen Mishra [Sgt.-Maj. Anandi Din Misra] had assumed command, as a Captain'. The Jemadar went on to observe that the 1st NI 'established it as a rule that men who joined from Furlough should get their places and promotion. Numbers joined in consequence and in my Regiment Subadar Gungadeen Missur and others joined, taking the rank of Colonel, Major, etc.'[14] Yet there were large numbers who not merely refused to join the mutineers but were prepared to fight alongside the Europeans in the entrenchment, one of them being the staunch old *subadar*-major, Bhawani Singh, of the

[13] On ringleaders in 3rd LC, Palmer, *Mutiny Outbreak*, p. 60; in 18th and 68th NI at Bareilly, *FSUP* v. 7; in 28th NI at Shahjahanpur, *FSUP* v. 200–6; on the 6th NI at Allahabad, *FSUP* iv. 553–5.

[14] *FSUP* iv. 669.

notoriously disaffected 2nd Light Cavalry. Ten native officers of the 53rd NI came into Wheeler's camp; and altogether some eighty to a hundred men of all ranks, including a high proportion of native officers, fought for a time on the British side until they were sent away.[15]

The sepoys were trained for formal formation fighting in the open. For actions up to company level new junior officers of a sort could readily be found, but to fight even quite small set-piece battles the problems of higher command needed to be resolved. Until Wheeler surrendered and the European males were massacred at Sati Chaura Ghat on 27 June, the rebel force at Kanpur was little more than a loose coalition of separate units in which the Nana acted as coadjutor. Each unit, including the Nana's personal force, established its own siege battery, and rained shot and shell on the entrenchment without displaying even the co-ordination required to put in a determined infantry assault. The victory over Wheeler, secured by stratagem and not arms, secured also the Nana's ascendancy. This ascendancy he proceeded to reinforce by retiring to his seat at Bithur for formal investment as Peshwa. Having thus symbolically revived the old Maratha confederacy as Bahadur Shah had revived the Mughal empire from Delhi, Dhondu Pant was quickly recalled to reality by the news that the British were advancing on Kanpur from Allahabad. A field army had now to be hastily organized and despatched to Fatehpur to bar Havelock's progress. The fighting which ensued, just like that which took place at the end of May and early June on the Delhi front, was of critical importance in shaping the later character of rebel methods of warfare. The initial actions fought against Havelock were all open encounters, and in every instance the rebels were worsted. Why was this?

The sepoys had no natural inferiority in courage or endurance or fighting capacity, though it was important for the British in the generation of that artificial collective mentality termed morale to believe that they had. Of all the agonies the flesh was heir to, the sepoys were the masters. When death was seen to be inevitable, they could meet it with a calm, stoic insouciance or with a fierce contemptuous

[15] Depositions taken at Cawnpore, *NE* iA, pp. 27 ff., especially deposition of Pay Havildar Ram Baksh, 53rd NI, p. 32: 'There were six subedars, four jemedars, nine havildars, six naicks, and twenty-two sepoys of my regiment . . . There were a good many of the 56th and 1st regiments NI, but the numbers of both did not equal that of the 53rd.' Also Kaye, *Sepoy War*, ii. 325.

pride that aroused awe and bewilderment in their white executioners. But in the collective enterprise of war, if courage was to be kept screwed to the sticking place, the need for organization was paramount. Especially was this true for the conduct of conventional operations on which the Nana's army now embarked. Yet what was there to provide even a rudimentary higher command structure and staff organization? In command of the force, the Nana placed one of his former troopers, Jwala Prasad, along with Tika Ram, a former *subadar* in the 2nd LC, as cavalry commander, and the Maulavi Liaqat Ali, whom Neill had driven out of Allahabad. To this scratch generalship was confided a force that lacked all homogeneity. Apart from the elements of a considerable number of regular and irregular units other than the four regiments of the Kanpur garrison, nearly half the rebel force consisted not of trained sepoys but armed insurgents.[16] These deficiencies might conceivably have been overcome if the rebels had employed their one obvious asset, superiority of numbers. Yet this was an advantage that took time to mobilize. In the first advance to contact, the rebels were able to send out only relatively small forces. To oppose Havelock's 2,000-strong column at Fatehpur on 12 July, they put only 3,500 men into the field, of which no more than 2,000 were regular troops. Even in the decisive battle for Kanpur on 16 July the Nana mustered only 5,000 men, although he supposedly had some 20,000 nominally under his orders.[17] It had been the same earlier at Delhi. At the opening engagement with the Delhi Field Force on 8 June at Badli-ki-Serai the rebels fielded 'a small force of infantry supported by 500 horse and 2 troops of horse artillery', estimated to number 'about 3,000', against Barnard's 2,600 men of all arms.[18]

These circumstances allowed the British to give their technical efficiency full play. British superiority lay in better tactical control and the disciplined use of fire-power. In particular, the skilled employment of artillery and the handling of the new long-range Enfield rifle by the line of skirmishers helped to smash infantry

[16] On the composition of the force opposing Havelock at Fatehpur on 12 July 1857, see Forrest, *State Papers*, ii. 87; Marshman, *Havelock*, p. 296.

[17] For estimates of rebel forces, Havelock's dispatches in Forrest, *State Papers*, ii. 87; Shepherd's narrative, cited *FSUP* iv. 588.

[18] For the numbers at Badli-ki-Serai, C. Ball, *The History of the Indian Mutiny* (London, n.d.), i. 96. Cave-Browne, *Punjab and Delhi*, i. 316, 320, states that Barnard's total force consisted of 2,400 infantry, 600 cavalry, and 22 guns, of which 1,900 infantry and 529 cavalry were engaged in the action at Badli-ki-Serai.

concentrations and destroy their cohesion before the fighting got to close quarters. Of his opening clash at Fatehpur as both sides were advancing to contact, Havelock later wrote that 'in [the first] ten minutes the affair was decided. For in that short time our Enfield rifles and cannon had taken all conceit of fight out of the mutineers . . . our fight was fought, neither with musket nor bayonet nor sabre but with Enfield rifles and cannon, so we lost no men. The enemy's fire scarcely touched us; ours, for four hours allowed him no repose.' In his Field Force Order of 13 July 1857 Havelock publicly thanked his soldiers for 'their arduous exertions of yesterday, which produced in four hours the strange result of a rebel army driven from a strong position, eleven guns captured, and their whole force scattered to the winds without the loss of a single British soldier. To what is this magical effect to be attributed? To the fire of British artillery, exceeding in rapidity and precision all that the British General has ever witnessed in his not short career; to the power of the Enfield rifle in British hands, and to the British *pluck* . . .'.[19] It was much the same at the Hindan river on 30 and 31 May when Archdale Wilson against a greater disparity of numbers threw back a rebel column thrusting towards Meerut from Delhi.[20] The dashing handling of the guns by Tombs and the telling effect of the Enfields in the hands of a wing of the 60th Rifles were the secret of British success.

British victories were not always the product of superior technology. In the battle for Kanpur the guns eventually became bogged in the rear, and there was no other way of silencing a formidable rebel 18-pounder than by employing infantry to capture it by a direct bayonet assault. The same necessity was forced on Barnard

[19] For quotations from Havelock, J. C. Pollock, *Way to Glory. The Life of Havelock of Lucknow* (London, 1957), pp. 168, 170; and Marshman, *Havelock*, pp. 293–5. The only men armed with Enfield rifles were 160 men of 1st Madras European Fusiliers, who were employed in a skirmishing role. Two hundred and fifty Enfields were issued to the entire regiment at Calcutta: India Milit. Progs., 22 May 1857, No. 39.

[20] For the Hindan battle, see Wilson's dispatches, printed Forrest, *State Papers*, i. 284–8. Rebel numbers were estimated at 3,000 to 4,000: India Milit. Progs. 12 June 1857, No. 239. The numbers grew in the telling. Roberts later stated, 'Seven hundred British soldiers defeated seven times their number': Roberts, *Forty-One Years*, p. 265. Cave-Browne wrote that 700 Europeans attacked ten times their number: *Punjab and Delhi*, i. 213. Sayyid Mubarak Shah related that the rebel force consisted of three regiments, four horse artillery guns, one gun of a bullock battery, and 400 cavalry, cited Edwardes, *Red Year*, p. 63 and Haq, *The Great Revolution of 1857*, p. 160. If so, the total could not have exceeded 3,500 men.

at Badli-ki-Serai, where the British gunners found themselves unable to silence the rebel artillery. On these occasions, however, the British owed their success to elementary tactical superiority in turning their enemy's flank, and to a command system that enabled them to put in the infantry charge at the critical moment. It was in this higher control of the battle that the rebels were deficient. As one observer commented on their performance at the action of the Pandu Nadi, near Kanpur, on 15 July, 'the inferior details of their movements were perfect, but the master mind was wanting'.

The result of these initial defeats was to teach the mutineers to avoid open encounter and to fight, wherever possible, behind stone walls. Once he had crossed the Ganges at Kanpur and struck along the Lucknow road, Havelock quickly found that the day of cheap victories was over. On 29 July beyond Unao he caught his enemy in the open and drove them flying by means of his artillery and Enfield rifles as of old, but the previous storming of Unao and the fortified village of Bashiratganj on the same day had proved heavy and costly work. His handful of élite troops—the 78th Highlanders—could still be relied on to rise to the occasion. At the third action at Bashiratganj on 12 August, before Havelock finally withdrew across the Ganges, the surviving 120 Highlanders gladdened the old Baptist general's heart by the unhesitating way in which—'overwhelmed almost with shot, shell and grape—up to their middles in swamp'—they came forward to 'rush with a cheer on two guns behind entrenchments and defended by not less than 2,000 sepoys, and wrest them from them without a second's check'.[21] Yet the unfailing valour of a few could not disguise the fact that Havelock had been beaten by his adversary's employment of superior numbers and new defensive tactics, and that the morale of most of his tired and ailing soldiers was breaking. One final advantage the rebels had also turned to account, the hostility of the countryside. Justifying the decision to give up the attempt to reach Lucknow, Lt.-Col. Tytler, Havelock's chief staff officer, noted the changed conditions:

> . . . we found we thrashed the Oudh people easily in the open, but failed to force two occupied serais—the men hung back . . . It became painfully evident to all that we could never reach Lucknow; we had three strong positions to force, defended by fifty guns and 30,000 men. One night and a day

[21] Harry Havelock, cited Pollock, *Way to Glory*, p. 211.

had cost us, in sick and wounded, 104 Europeans and a fourth of our gun ammunition: this does not include our killed and dead, some ten men. We had 1,010 effective Europeans and could consequently parade 900 or so; the men are cowed by the numbers opposed to them, and the endless fighting. Every village is held against us, the zemindars have risen to oppose us; all the men killed yesterday were zemindars. We know them to be all around us in bodies of 500 or 600, independent of the regular levies . . .[22]

Despite the Highlanders gallantry the bulk of Havelock's small force was clearly coming to the end of its tether. He had had to upbraid the wing of the 64th for hesitancy in attack at the battle before Kanpur; and at Bashiratganj on 29 July he complained pointedly that some of them had fought as if the cholera had seized their minds as well as their bodies.[23] It might have been supposed that the rebels had hit upon the formula for defeating the British advance. Unable to prevent Havelock taking each of their defended positions in turn, they had nevertheless worn him down by the tactics of attrition. To fight and run away rather than risk everything on pitched battles seemed now the prescription for success.

Havelock found that he was fighting a different enemy in Oudh. He had scattered the Nana's army irretrievably at Kanpur, although because of his lack of cavalry to follow up this and his earlier successes rebel losses had been remarkably light.[24] The sepoys had at first fought sturdily, but their repeated failure in attempting to hold their gun line against the British infantry assault not only cost them 24 guns but fatally impaired their morale by the time the British entered Kanpur. It was a failure in the iron test of the conventional infantry soldier—the ability to press home or to withstand the bayonet assault. Yet to pass that test required the highest unit discipline and an officer corps whose honour system made them cheerfully accept a casualty rate threefold that of their men. The lesson of the Nana's defeat was not lost. So far as can be ascertained, he himself took no direct part in further fighting. After crossing the Ganges he hung with a small force on the flank of the actions fought on 29 July at Unao and Bashiratganj, hoping perhaps to cut in behind Havelock or to double back across the river and threaten

[22] Telegrams from Lt.-Col. Tytler to C.-in-C., 31 July and 6 Aug. 1857, Forrest, *State Papers*, ii. 167, 173.

[23] Cited Pollock, *Way to Glory*, p. 198.

[24] Havelock estimated rebel casualties as 150 at Fatehpur, 200 at Aong, and about 250 at Kanpur, a combined total of 700. Havelock to C.-in-C., 30 July 1857, Forrest, *State Papers*, ii. 166.

Kanpur once the British had plunged deep into Oudh.[25] Yet the three native infantry regiments forming the original Kanpur garrison (1st, 53rd, and 56th NI) had quitted his service and passed under new masters. By now they must have been much reduced in numbers, and certainly formed only a minor part of the very much larger rebel army Havelock found barring his path.

This new rebel army had been hastily dispatched from Lucknow on the news of Havelock's capture of Kanpur on 17 July and of his immediate move across the Ganges. By then the rebel regime in Lucknow had been set up barely a fortnight and its immediate efforts had been directed to destroying the British force holding out in the Lucknow Residency. From the outset the sepoys of the regular Bengal army were in no position to dictate the course of rebellion as they were at Delhi or Kanpur. For Oudh, annexed to the Company's territories only in the previous year, was held with staggering lightness. Apart from a single European regiment (HM 32nd), the Lucknow garrison consisted of three native infantry regiments (13th, 48th, and 71st NI) and one native cavalry regiment (7th LC). Outside Lucknow there were the 41st NI at Sitapur and the 22nd NI at Faizabad, as well as the 15th Irregular Cavalry at Sultanpur and Faizabad. These units were enmeshed with the far more numerous Oudh Irregular Force, consisting of ten regiments of infantry, three of cavalry, and three batteries of field artillery—all for the most part recruited from the former Oudh royal army dissolved at the time of annexation. In the hour of crisis, a significant portion of the regular Company sepoys at Lucknow—among the 13th, 48th, and 71st NI—remained faithful to the British and fought beside them in the Residency, while the 'bloodthirsty 41st' at Sitapur broke up, most of the men going off to Fatehgarh. In these circumstances the regular sepoys who mutinied inevitably had to play second fiddle in the rebel orchestra. Innes reckoned that in the force besieging the Residency there were the equivalent of two regular native infantry regiments compared with eight Oudh local regiments.[26]

[25] Havelock to C.-in-C., 29 July 1857, states that Nana was about twenty miles off on the Oudh side (viz. at Fatehpur Chaurasi), Forrest, *State Papers*, ii. 161. Another report suggests the Nana visited Lucknow on 1 August, *FSUP* ii. 116.

[26] J. J. McLeod Innes, *Lucknow and Oude in the Mutiny* (London, 1896), p. 97, cited Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*, p. 197. The heads of the rebel army who helped set up Birjis Qadr as king included Raghunath Singh (Capt. Police Battalion), Umrao Singh (6th Oude Locals), Barkat Ahmad (Subadar, 15th Irregular Cavalry), and

It was not, therefore, a regular sepoy army that Havelock encountered when he crossed into Oudh but a hastily improvised force composed mainly of irregulars. There is a near-contemporary Indian account of what occurred:

> Ubdool Hadee Khan Kandaharee was despatched with two companies from each regiment in Lucknow, and 14 guns to check the General's progress, but he was defeated, and his guns were captured. Tuhwar Hossein was then ordered to take command, but he refused, and Mahomed Hossein who was formerly Chakladar volunteered and set out against the General. He got as far as Busheergunge where he fell in with the British Army and was defeated. He, however, with his men did not take to heels [*sic*], but remained at Nawabgunge, and fell upon the British Troops when the General, harassed by the men of [the taluqdars] Munsub Aly, Iessa [Jussa] Singh, Baboo Rambuksh and others, retreated into Oonao. The Rebel troops mustered 10,000 strong and were reinforced by the Cawnpore fugitive regiments excepting a wing of the Nadree battalion, which remained with the Nana at Futtehpore [Chaurasi]. The General in consequence could not make head and was obliged to fall back on Cawnpore, and Mohamed Hossein with his troops encamped on the banks of the River [Ganges].[27]

Although the rebels had compelled Havelock to retire into Kanpur, his foray into Oudh had taught them some severe lessons. Despite the relative success of their new defensive tactics in fighting a series of delaying actions from fortified villages along the Lucknow road and in employing the *taluqdars'* levies to harass the British flanks, the rebels had failed to solve their major handicap in giving battle. They still proved unable to protect their splendidly served artillery. After the actions on 29 July, Havelock was able to report that 'the whole of the guns of the 5th Company of 7th Battalion, Artillery, were taken by us, with nearly all its ammunition'.[28] Having lost 19 guns in this way, the rebels were careful to vary their tactics in the second action at Bashiratganj on 5 August and kept the bulk of their artillery much farther to the rear, pushing forward only four pieces, two of which were 24-pounders. These were,

Rajmand Tiwari (22nd NI). The first two and the last were members of the Court or Council of the rebel regime. The composition of the military council for the conduct of operations shows how much it was dominated by officers of the Oudh forces and of recently raised rebel regiments, *FSUP* ii. pp. 110, 113.

[27] Account of rebellion in Oudh written in defence of Man Singh, undated and without author, as part of evidence gathered by Captain Bruce in 1859–60; Bruce Papers, BM Add. MSS 44,002, f. 10.

[28] Forrest, *State Papers*, ii. 163.

however, no match for the four 24-pounders that Havelock was able to advance right to the forefront because of the protection the Enfield rifles of the Madras Fusiliers afforded: 'our heavy guns silenced them and they were withdrawn, the enemy retiring slowly, forced back but not beaten. It was purely an artillery fight, the infantry only occupying the villages when the enemy were expelled.' The British regarded the whole action as 'most unsatisfactory' since the rebels were able to withdraw their guns and retire with their main force in good order, but the rebels suffered an estimated 300 killed and wounded to 25 on the British side. The next occasion when the rebels withstood Havelock, they sent forward a smaller force of some 4,000 and entrenched a village a short distance in advance of Bashiratganj, with six horse-artillery guns in close support. Yet this was to repeat the earlier experience, the Highlanders storming and capturing their guns at the point of the bayonet. Lieutenant Campbell wrote afterwards: 'We always find the artillery of the enemy most wonderfully served, and they stand to their guns like men, their infantry are *most cowardly*, and their cavalry *deplorable*.'[29] It had escaped him that these were no longer regular troops and that the high state of training of the Oudh artillery batteries was an exception to the general rule. Even so, having vindicated his superiority in close-quarter fighting, Havelock felt compelled to retire before them.

After withdrawing across the Ganges into Kanpur on 15 August, Havelock's wearied legions were called on immediately to deal with the regular sepoy elements that had gathered at the Nana's seat at Bithur and from there threatened the British hold on Kanpur. Although apparently the three sepoy regiments of the Kanpur garrison—the 1st, 53rd, and 56th NI—stayed with the Oudh rebels, men of other regular units filtered back into Bithur in the first week of August. When attacked on 16 August, they put up a spirited fight, but they possessed only two small guns, and Havelock was able to pound them with what he called his 'powerful artillery'. After an hour's obstinate resistance they were forced to retreat, leaving their guns and 250 killed and wounded. Among the rebel ranks, Havelock identified men of the 42nd NI, the mutinied portion of the 31st NI and 3rd Irregular Cavalry—all from Sagar; the 17th NI from Azamgarh via Faizabad, the 6th NI from Allahabad,

[29] Havelock's dispatch, 12 Aug. 1857, PP 1857–8, xliv, pt. 1, pp. 142–3.

and men from other units like the 41st NI from Sitapur.[30] This final defeat at Bithur shattered what was left of their regimental organization. Already on the morrow of Havelock's earlier victory outside Kanpur on 16 July, signs of disorganization had been manifest, the fleeing rebel troops reportedly casting away uniforms and muskets as they crossed the Ganges.[31] A large mass including the 2nd Light Cavalry made their way up the right bank of the river to Fatehgarh rather than cross over at Bithur into Oudh.[32] According to the young Eurasian drummer, John Fitchett, one of the groups was commanded by *subadar* Bhundu Singh of the 17th NI and comprised some 200 men belonging to his regiment and the 6th NI. After spending some six days at Fatehgarh, Bhundu Singh's band returned and took part in the action at Bithur on 16 August, only to hasten back to Fatehgarh after the British success. By this time, the band had swollen to 500, but his pretensions aroused the anger of Ahmed Yar Khan, one of the *nazims* in the rebel regime at Farukhabad, who had him deposed from all command.

Bhundu Singh's history supplies an illustrative text on the stages by which an army revolt could rapidly collapse from within and lose its distinguishing character. It can be traced from the outset, when unit identity and all regimental forms and usages were carefully preserved, to the point where the sepoys had become ragged and confused bands under a war leader and were finally obliged to come under civilian command. On the outbreak of mutiny, the 17th NI had marched out of Azamgarh for Faizabad 'with all the pomp of war'. The inflation of Bhundu Singh's status followed the weakening of formal regimental organization and reached its fullest extent after the defeat at Kanpur on 16 July. 'He was the general. The Hindoos called him Rajah; he had elephants, a carriage and two buggies, and some three or four horses . . . The sepoys said he had two hackeries laden with treasure.'[33] None of the units fighting

[30] Gimlete mentions the presence of many other units but his authority is uncertain.

[31] Shepherd's narrative and Sherer's account, Forrest, *State Papers*, ii. 23–5, iii. xxxvii, cited P. C. Gupta, *Nana Sahib and the Rising at Cawnpore* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 142, 144. Also Captain Bruce to Brig. Chamberlain, 9 Aug. 1857, Muir, *Intelligence Records*, i. 140, 457.

[32] William Clarke, musician of the 6th NI, stated that the mutineers proceeding to Fatehgahar comprised 'a body of about 12 or 13,000 men, but without a leader, and each one followed his own course', Cawnpore Depositions, p. 14. Also confirmed by W. T. De Cruze, another musician, *NE* iA, p. 18.

[33] Evidence of John Fitchett, Cawnpore Depositions, p. 9, *NE* iA. On Bhundu Singh, *FSUP* i. 343 ff. On 17th NI at Azamgarh, *NE* i. 35.

at Bithur on 16 August, including the fresh regiments from Sagar, ever appeared again as an identifiable unit. Defeat was, of course, the main agency of regimental disintegration, but the latter was also hastened by the loss of those facilities that keep an army in trim, above all magazines and depots to replenish equipment and ammunition and to supply fresh drafts of men. Time in that sense was not on the sepoys' side. An army wore out like clothing and needed frequent renewal. Its tatterdemalion appearance was also of more than symbolic significance. In the hour of desperation the British might dispense with regular uniform and strict punctilio, but once the crisis was passed and their regiments multiplied, their military practice tightened rather than relaxed. For the sepoys the abandonment of shakos and jackets might have been sensible for ease of fighting, but it helped obliterate distinction of company and regiment and turned them increasingly from regular soldiers into civil insurgents.[34] After the defeat at Bithur in mid-August 1857 there was no formed sepoy opposition remaining in the Doab districts or the eastern part of the North-Western Provinces, only the Dinapur mutineers making their way to Banda. With the disintegration of the rebel sepoy regiments, the survivors either melted into the countryside or took service with the levies of disaffected magnates and *taluqdars* and passed into the ranks of civil rebellion.

The Oudh regime was given more than a month's respite from mid-August before the British advance on Lucknow was renewed. The rebels were free to choose the ground on which to contest it. On purely military considerations the obvious course would have been to occupy the north bank of the Ganges opposite Kanpur in strength so as to oppose the British crossing. The river was flowing much too fast for the 3,200-strong British force to be put across in small boats, and the construction of a pontoon bridge could be undertaken only after a bridgehead had been won and held. Yet for the rebels to fight on the Ganges meant stripping Lucknow of a large part of its defending army, a course which by this time was evidently unacceptable to the many-headed rebel regime. Another option was to wear down the British advance by falling back slowly all the way to Lucknow through a series of fortified villages and defended river obstacles. In the event, the British crossed over unmolested, the rebels putting up a token resistance at Mangalwar

[34] On the discarding of uniform by the mutineers: among 6th NI at Kanpur, Cawnpore Depositions, p. 35. *NEI.*

and then falling back precipitously on Lucknow. Outram and Havelock reached the outskirts of the city on 23 September, having taken only three days after crossing the Ganges. After so many defeats in detail, sepoy infantry and *zamindari* men ready to sacrifice themselves in a controlled withdrawal action were not forthcoming. Nor probably were the requisite organization and military skill. Even for highly trained troops, the defence of villages was regarded as a task of special difficulty since it isolated soldiers in small detachments and created serious problems of overall control. The three regular sepoy regiments of the Kanpur garrison must by now have been skeleton units, although they are said to have stayed together. Their resistance at Mangalwar on 21 September was token, and the colours of the 1st NI were taken.[35]

In the circumstances, the precipitate withdrawal of the rebels to Lucknow was a sensible move, compelling the British to lengthen their already extended line of communication, and to storm their way to the Residency in desperate and costly street-fighting. The subsequent incarceration of Outram and Havelock's relieving force in the Residency quarter was militarily though not politically a rebel gain. The British force was neutralized until another could be assembled by Colin Campbell to pull it out. Even then, in November 1857, the second relief operation served to impress upon Campbell the immense strength of the rebel position. The few regular sepoy units in rebel service had been skilfully employed to defend the key points and the taking of the Sikanderabagh and Shah Najaf mosque cost Campbell dearly. His consequent resolve to withdraw and not to move against the city for its final recapture without an army of 30,000 men was testimony to the short-term success of rebel tactics. By avoiding pitched battles in the open, the regime had gained time. Although the counter-offensive power of its own irregular army was pitiful, there was still a faint chance that the substantial and better-trained Gwalior Contingent might yet deal the British a crippling blow while they were still weak on the ground. Estimated to number 25,000 men with an artillery train of 40 guns, it was the last uncommitted force in Northern India. By November 1857, it had at length resolved its own internal hesitations and had been brought into action under Tantia Topi's leadership against the small British garrison holding Kanpur. Deceived by the

[35] Forrest, *State Papers*, ii. 218. For the history of the three sepoy regiments of the Kanpur garrison, see the account of Gimlete under 1st 53rd and 56th NI.

ease with which he had sent Windham's men scuttling back into the bridgehead entrenchment with the loss of their commissariat stores, Tantia Topi was unprepared for the counter-blow. Campbell had pulled out of Lucknow just in time to come racing to Windham's aid, and on 6 December drove the Gwalior men helplessly before him. The rout was completed by Hope Grant's subsequent action at Sheorajpur three days later, the rebel army losing 30 of its 40 guns. The folly of formal warfare in the open had been crushingly demonstrated.

In contrast to the subordinate role into which regular army mutineers were rapidly thrust elsewhere, at Delhi the struggle embodied the sepoy war *par excellence*. Here the largest number of regular sepoys were collected and the fiercest continuous fighting raged. Here if anywhere the historical cause of the sepoy mutineers' defeat, despite their immense numerical superiority, would appear to be discoverable. For was it not the case, as contemporaries believed, that the British-led Delhi Field Force, at no time numbering more than 9,000 effectives, and itself beleaguered for three months, could turn round and carry by assault a walled city containing some 30,000 to 40,000 armed men?[36] These matters have lain for so long encased within the tough integument of national and racial presupposition, that they need to be probed anew if a rational and rounded appreciation of the causes of the sepoy defeat is to be obtained.

When the mutineers seized the imperial city on 11 May they comprised five under-strength infantry regiments (11th and 20th NI from Meerut, and the 38th, 54th, and 74th NI already at Delhi), half a regiment of cavalry (3rd LC from Meerut), and one light battery and a company of foot artillery (No. 5 and 3rd Co. at Delhi). Their total numbers could not have exceeded 4,000 men.[37]

[36] British estimates of the size of the rebel force when the city was assaulted vary wildly. The standard account of Roberts put it at 30,000 men: *Forty-One Years*, p. 139. Wilson's estimate at the time was 40,000; Hodson's 70,000, cited Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*, p. 108. The most inflated was that of Hope Grant, *Incidents of the Sepoy War*, pp. 86–7: 'After the fall of Delhi a return was discovered, from which it appeared that the mutineers' force amounted to 40,000 men exclusive of the male adult population, principally Mahomedans, who must have numbered 70,000 or 80,000 men, armed to the teeth and capable of fighting even more desperately than the sepoys.'

[37] Muin Al Din gave a total of only 2,530 for the mutineer force on 12 May, C. T. Metcalfe (ed.), *Two Native Narratives of the Mutiny of Delhi* (Westminster, 1898), p.61 (hereafter *TNN*). The parade strength of the three native infantry regiments at

But they were rapidly reinforced. From 22 to 27 May they were joined by elements of the 9th NI from Aligarh, Mainpuri, Etawah, and Bulandshahr; from 3 to 4 June, by men of the 44th and 67th NI who had been disarmed and discharged at Agra (except for a company who had mutinied with their arms at Mathura). There were also accessions of irregular troops; on 3 June the Haryana Light Infantry and 400 *sowars* of the 4th Irregular Cavalry arrived from Hansi. In addition, considerable numbers of military men in and around Delhi were attracted by the prospect of pay and loot to be won in the cause of ridding the land of the white man's yoke; and Bahadur Shah is said to have raised 400 horse and 1,600 foot from this source on 13 June.[38]

Yet it remains true that for the first critical encounters at the Hindan river on 30 and 31 May, and at Badli-ki-Serai on 8 June, the rebels had no vast superiority of trained regular force to deploy. Their regimental organization had been damaged by the internal commotion of mutiny and the Meerut regiments had come in incomplete. The situation created by the sudden lapse of British authority and the release of the gaol population was such as temporarily to destroy all vestiges of discipline, and the sepoys' instinctive response was that of Blucher's on first seeing London: 'What a city to loot!' They were not in a position to plunder so unrestrainedly and systematically as the British and Sikh troops after the recapture of the city in September, but their persistent looting remained a serious problem for the rebel regime.[39] Indeed, it was partly to get the sepoys out of town that the King encouraged the dispatch of columns against the British, and it was in this way, according to

Meerut was 2,234, and the cavalry 504. Only half (three troops) of the 3rd LC reportedly entered Delhi, and 125 of the 11th NI remained at Meerut in British service. The upper possible limit for the Meerut mutineers in Delhi would be 1,850; for the three native infantry regiments stationed at Delhi, 2,700. Artillery numbers would be small. Allowing for desertions, an overall figure of 4,000 is on the high side. For Meerut parade strengths, Palmer, *Mutiny Outbreak*, p. 35.

[38] According to Rajab Ali Khan's return, cited *FSUP* v. 1009. This has to be used with caution. The dates for the arrival of mutinied regiments are later than those given by Mohan Lal (extracts from diary; Kaye's Mutiny Papers, IOL HMS, vol. 725, ff. 360–4) and may possibly have been manipulated to show that the rebel force was smaller than it really was immediately after Badli-ki-Serai on 8 June and that the city could have been taken by a *coup de main*. I have followed Mohan Lal whose dates are better supported by other evidence, such as the *NE*.

[39] Looting was worst during May and June but went on intermittently throughout the siege; *TNN*, pp. 122–7; PP 1859 (1st Sess.), xviii. 129.

Jiwan Lal's account, that the expedition to Meerut originated which clashed with Wilson's force on the Hindan river on 30 May.[40]

The rebel junta represented an uneasy and confused condominium on the part of the army and the royal palace. Yet the army was in need of more than merely a new paymaster and political respectability for its cause. 'The sepoys are without a leader', reported the newswriter of the raja of Kapurthala.[41] A notional arrangement was concluded under which the King's sons should each be allotted a regiment as colonel, no doubt principally in the role of a political officer, but none showed the natural force of character to translate himself from the palace stews to be the man on horseback. When Mirza Abu Bakr was sent out with the Meerut column, he is said to have watched the Hindan battle from a housetop, but the experience of a single shell exploding close by so unnerved him that he fled back to Delhi. The story may be apocryphal but it illustrates the contempt into which royal efforts at military leadership rapidly fell.[42]

To produce under these conditions a co-ordinated force of all arms capable of withstanding the British advance on Delhi down the Grand Trunk Road was no simple matter, and the defeat at Badli-ki-Serai on 8 June confirmed that some tactic other than conventional formation fighting in the open was required. Yet the rebels found themselves in a sharp dilemma. In the week following Badli-ki-Serai, their numbers were probably some 7,000 or so trained troops[43] confronting a British force of approximately 3,000 ensconced on the Ridge overlooking the city. The tide of mutiny was now in full spate and over the coming three weeks the rebels could anticipate large reinforcements to their numbers. The bastions of the curtain wall along the northern face of the city gave their heavy artillery excellent firing platforms and immunity from infantry attack, while the weight of their guns and the efficient manner in which they were served gave them a truly formidable defensive capability. For political reasons the British were desperate to recover Delhi. The obvious rebel strategy would have been to sit

40 *TNN*, p. 99.

41 *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 1, p. 75. Report dated 13 May.

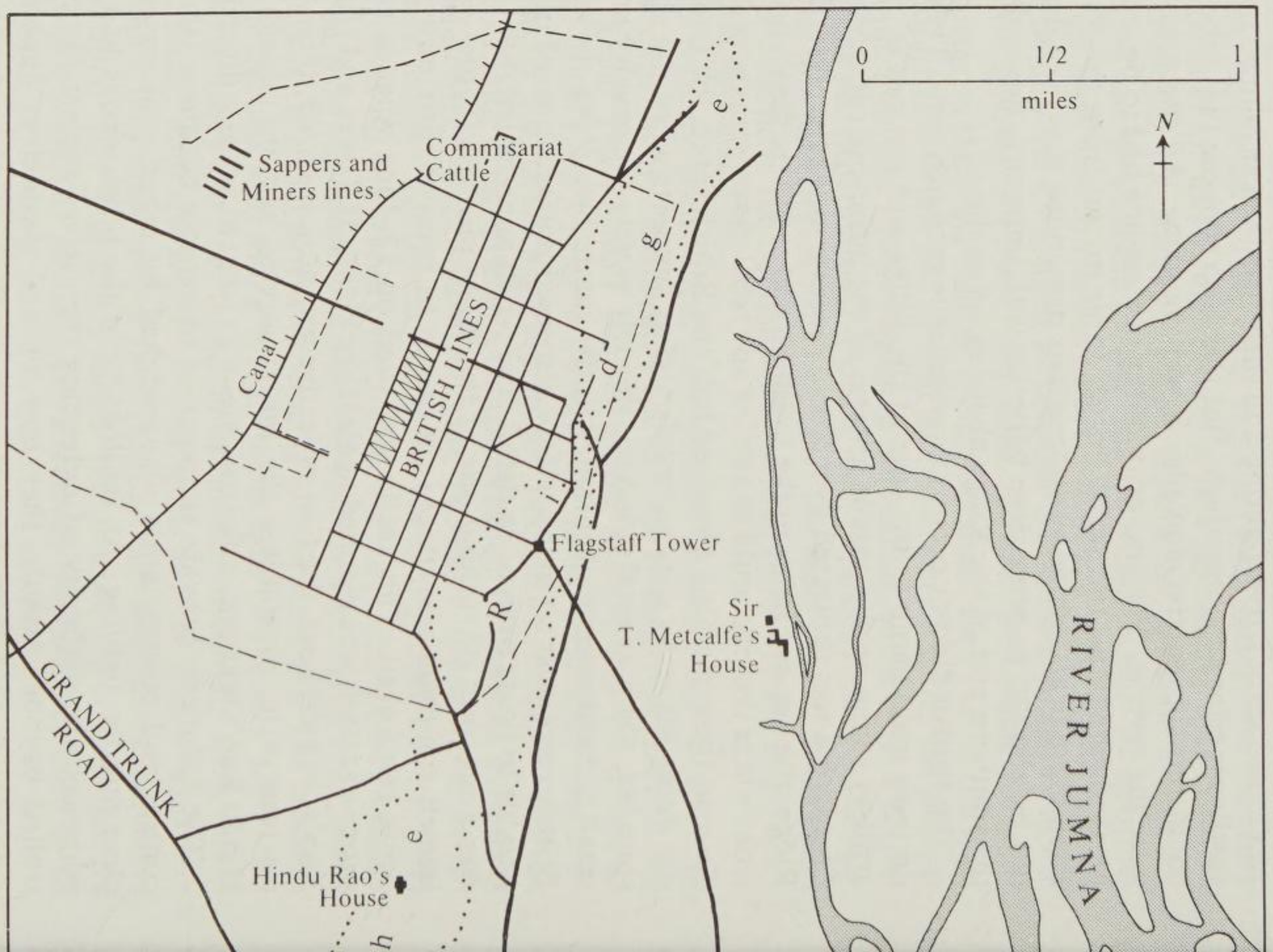
42 Narrative of Moinodin (Mu'in-al-Din), *TNN*, p.62.

43 The figure is Hodson's (W. S. R. Hodson, *Twelve Years of a Soldier's Life in India*, London, 1859, p. 239), normally not a sound authority; there seems no reason to dispute his estimate, though he may have pitched it on the low side to prove that the city could be taken by a *coup de main*.

still, waiting for their own numbers to grow and allowing the British to waste valuable lives in operations beneath the walls. If the British assaulted and even broke through the walls, they could be swallowed up in street-fighting and their rear then enveloped by the vastly superior rebel numbers. But this is to suppose that rebellion could remain inactive and play a waiting game. All the pressures were the reverse. The authority of the new regime had to be seen to be vindicated and the small British force driven from the Ridge. Even more near-sighted considerations demanded that they should not be allowed to erect siege batteries with impunity, especially at the southern end of the Ridge abutting on to the city.

The British did not occupy a continuous entrenchment. They set up their main camp in the rear of the Ridge and just out of rebel artillery range on the parade ground of the burnt-out cantonment. Their front was protected by a line of picquets along the crest of the Ridge, the key one being at the southern end at Hindu Rao's house, from where the city could be shelled and rebel movements observed. To man these picquets absorbed half the British force, the remainder doing stand-by duty as reliefs and as supports when the alarm sounded. On a general stand-to, this left merely the cavalry and a small tactical reserve of infantry in the camp. Stretching the small British force over so many widely dispersed points rendered it vulnerable to being overrun in detail. The rebels appreciated that there was a prospect of rushing one of the Ridge picquets if they could launch simultaneous attacks on others to prevent their objective being reinforced. This tactic was tried on 12 June when a twin-pronged attack was planned against the Flagstaff Tower and Hindu Rao's, but although the first objective was almost seized, there was no reserve to consolidate the initial success and the assault on Hindu Rao's was put in far too late in the day to act as a diversion.

The failure to provide supports or to achieve adequate tactical control and co-ordination was matched by other weaknesses in close-quarter fighting. At Badli-ki-Serai the rebel sepoys had experienced the difficulty of defending themselves against the controlled bayonet assault; they now showed themselves unable to deliver such an assault themselves. Since the time of Frederick the Great this was the supreme test of the infantry soldier, requiring disciplined collective action of the highest order. But to be nerved for the charge against guns belching grape and the deadly volleys of the Brown Bess musket at close range, the cool, intrepid leadership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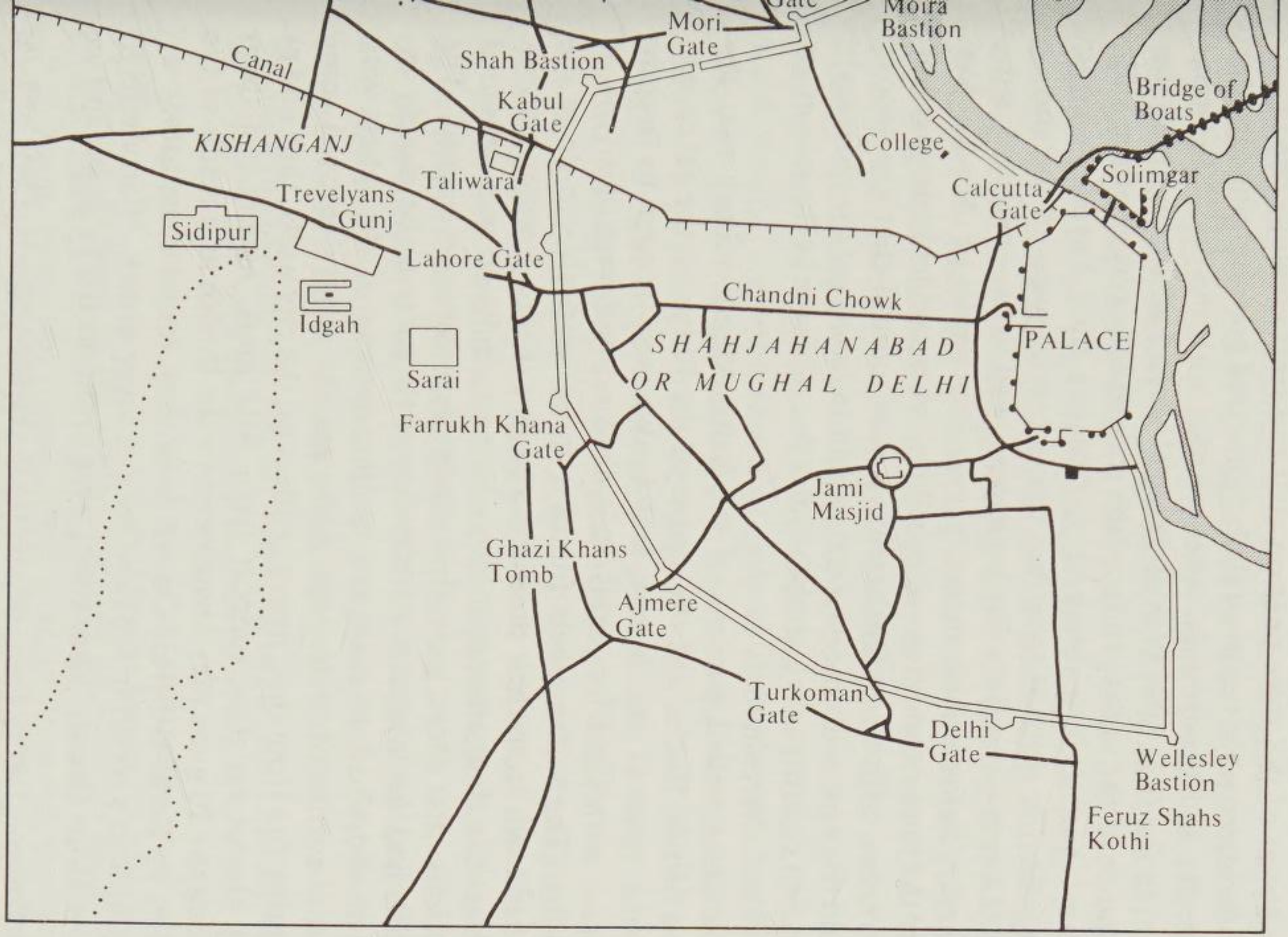


2. The siege of Delhi 1857

of an officer class prepared to sacrifice itself unflinchingly was indispensable. For decades the native infantry regiments had been starved of their proper establishment of officers because of the secondment of the abler ones on civil and staff employ. The result had often been poor regimental discipline and poor fighting morale. At Mudki and Ferozeshah, when serving with the 2nd NI (Grenadiers) in the first Sikh War of 1845, Hodson had encountered the reluctance of the sepoys to face 'the tremendous power of the Sikh artillery' and their inability to put in the final bayonet charge though having reached to within ten to twenty paces of the enemy guns.[44] Other native infantry regiments, well led and directed, subsequently distinguished themselves at the battle of Aliwal. Yet under the looser conditions of rebellion, when suddenly deprived of their entire officer establishment, it was natural that the sepoys should dispense with the bayonet assault in favour of the older style of Indian fighting in which the soldier fought more in the role of an individual sharpshooter.

The close-walled gardens of the Sabzi Mandi suburb that lay below Hindu Rao's, and the slopes of the Ridge on the other side running towards the Jumna and broken and scored by woody ravines, were ideal for small-scale actions employing this type of fighting. The sepoy rebels found it more profitable to draw the British down from their positions and give them a running fight in such terrain than attempt to press home assaults on well-defended positions. But there were first costly lessons to be learned. The British had no intention of allowing their posts to be closely invested and chose to meet the spoiling attacks of the rebels with counter-sorties of their own. Although the sepoys enjoyed some covering fire from their heavy artillery on the city walls, they had at first almost no close support from field guns, having lost them among the 26 guns they abandoned to the British as a result of the action at Badli-ki-Serai. On 12 June they found their attack on Hindu Rao's bloodily repulsed by a counter-attack. 'Fortunately', wrote Hope Grant, '[the rebels] were unsupported by guns, and we

[44] Hodson, *Twelve Years*, pp. 11–13; D. Featherstone, *At Them with the Bayonet: The First Sikh War* (London, 1968), pp. 57, 65, 81–2; G. Bruce, *Six Battles for India: The Anglo-Sikh Wars, 1845–6, 1848–9* (London, 1969), pp. 115 ff. Also, 'Our Sepoy Army', *Colburn's United Services Magazine*, Jan.–Feb. 1870, cited Brig.-Gen. C. H. Brownlow, PP 1877, lxii. 436. On the role of the bayonet charge in traditional British tactics, cf. Col. G. F. R. Henderson, *The Science of War* (London, 1905), pp. 132 ff.

walked into them effectually, killing three or four hundred, and driving the rest back to the town in terrible confusion.'[45]

This and other similar fruitless attacks quickly wore down and dispirited the original mutineer force. Intelligence reaching the British camp from their Indian spies in the city bore the obvious taint of partiality, but it could not have been devoid of substance. On 17 June a spy reported: 'The old body of the mutineers has had all the fighting taken out of them, and quarrel on the slightest grounds.'[46] Some regiments had already been severely mauled before the fighting on the Ridge commenced. The 38th NI reputedly suffered heavy losses at the Hindan on 31 May and at Badli-ki-Serai was 'so badly cut up that they never kept in one body again'.[47] The original mutineers were also corrupted by loot. Fearful for its security they carried their rupees and valuables on their person into action, increasing their own hesitancy to get to close quarters while heightening the eagerness of the Gurkhas and British. Colonel Keith Young received a report as early as 15 June: 'The mutineers who first came to Delhi have grown heavy on account of their being laden with plunder, and are no longer fit for action, and on being ordered to fight set forth excuses.'[48] Certainly on 13 June the practice of putting newly arrived rebel regiments straight into action was instituted, despite the danger of permanently damaging their offensive spirit by a premature setback. It was ironic that the 60th NI or Ambala men, who were pushed immediately into the attack on coming in from Rohtak, should be blamed for its failure and for the subsequent precipitate retreat.[49] From Major Reid's account—who commanded the Sirmur Gurkha regiment at Hindu Rao's—it was battle-craft rather than courage that was wanting:

> We heard this morning that two new regiments of mutineers had arrived in the city; that they were being armed and would attack us at 4 p.m. Sure

[45] Hope Grant, *Incidents in the Sepoy War*, p. 68. Also Hodson, *Twelve Years*, pp. 202–3.

[46] *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 1, p. 151.

[47] Gimlete, *Postscript*, p. 149. Gimlete rarely cites his authorities and his work abounds in inaccuracies; hence his statements have to be used with caution.

[48] K. Young, *Delhi—1857* (London, 1902), p. 63. Cf. Rajab Ali, Delhi News, 18 June: 'The 11th Regt., 54th Regt., and 74th. are very rich and show no disposition to fight' (*PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 1, p. 155).

[49] *TNN*, p. 121: entry for 13 June. But the dating of Jiwan Lal's journal, transposed to the modern calendar, is discrepant. The Badli-ki-Serai fight is given as 9 instead of 8 June, so 12 June may be meant in this instance. This is the date given by W. W. Ireland, *History of the Siege of Delhi by an Officer who Served There* (Edinburgh, 1861), p. 102. Kaye, however, says, 'The sixtieth was conspicuous in the action of the 13th' (Kaye, *Sepoy War*, ii. p. 547 n.).

enough on they came . . . I was all ready for them, and allowed them to come within twenty paces, when I opened with grape and musketry on all sides. I charged them with a couple of companies . . . over the hill . . . The 60th NI was one of the regiments that attacked us. They marched up the Grand Trunk Road in columns of sections right in front, and led the attack, headed by the Sirdar Bahadoor of the regiment, who made himself very conspicuous, calling out to his men to keep distance, as he intended to wheel to his left. They fought most desperately. The Sirdar Bahadoor of the 60th was killed by my orderly Lall Sing. I took the ribbon of India from his breast. The mutineers were about 5000 strong, Infantry and Cavalry.[50]

The British position was most exposed on its right or western flank, and it was on this side, where the line of the Ridge could be readily turned, that the rebels were freest to operate. For here they held ground outside the walled city to the west of the Lahore Gate in the built-up areas known as Teliwara, Kishanganj, and Pahariganj, with the Idgah height in their rear. If the rebels were going to make a serious effort to oust the British or cut the Grand Trunk Road by which they were supplied, it was from this side that it would have to be done. Yet to the north of Sabzi Mandi—a suburb which remained a no-man's-land for some weeks—the spurs of the low Aravalli hills died out and the flat Indian plain resumed. Although this left the rear of the British camp exposed, the ground permitted cavalry and horse artillery to deploy. All the old difficulties of fighting the British in open country must recur, the one advantage being the sanctuary of the walled city into which the rebels could retreat. Yet there seemed little alternative. Direct attack on Hindu Rao's and the Mound Picquet proved unavailing, despite repeated assaults on 12, 13, and 15 June. The attempt to enfilade Hindu Rao's by artillery fire also miscarried, a battery in the course of erection on the Idgah height being destroyed by a well-planned British sortie on 17 June.

Hence the arrival of the Nasirabad brigade on 17 and 18 June was put to immediate use. It was a compact force of two infantry regiments (15th and 30th NI), some attendant cavalry, and above all the famous Jelalabad horse artillery battery of six guns. Instead of husbanding this valuable contingent, the rebels are said to have refused it admittance to the city until it had blooded itself in battle.[51]

[50] Gen. Sir Charles Reid, *Extracts from Letters and Notes Written During the Siege of Delhi in 1857* (repr. with foreword by Lt.-Gen. Sir Francis Tuker; W. G. Kingham Printers Ltd., King's Langley, n.d., pp. 12–13).

[51] Ireland, *Siege of Delhi*, p. 114; H. H. Greathed, *Letters Written During the*

On 19 June it gave the British the most worrying fight they had fought so far. Evading the British picquets, it delivered a determined, well-directed attack on the British camp from the west. With only some 300 infantry and the cavalry (some 400–500 in number) left in the camp, the British were nearly driven in, the action going on long after nightfall. Fortunately for the British they possessed a two-to-one superiority in field guns, and by constant redeployment managed to save these from being overrun by the numerically superior rebel infantry. Yet despite the heavy execution inflicted by their guns the British were unable as on early occasions to send the rebels flying and capture their artillery; indeed, had the Nasirabad troops been backed up by reinforcements from the city and so enabled to hold their ground until the following day, the British would have been severely pressed.[52] As it was, having forced the British back almost to their camp, they drew off in good order. This inability to follow up an initial advantage exposed the glaring want of a higher directing organization among the rebels. Each major attack was a sharp, short-lived effort, after which the rebels gave up their ground and retired into the city; a period of quiet then usually ensued allowing the hard-driven British force opportunity to recuperate. The plain military principle of the maintenance of the offensive was set at defiance or regarded as inoperable.

For the time the most serious effect of these separate, fruitless attacks was the squandering of rebel military resources; their general morale was still sustained by the news of thousands of fresh mutineers flocking to their aid. On 22 June the Jullunder contingent (3rd, 36th, and 61st NI) reached Delhi. It was far from complete, lacking an artillery component, having lost numbers in fighting *en route*, and having left behind in the Punjab some 350 men still faithful to the British. Yet it was flung next day, the centenary of Plassey, into a grand attack on the British position. As with an earlier attack carried out on 19 June, the original plan was to envelope

Siege of Delhi (London, 1858), pp. 61–2. Other documents suggest the Nasirabad troops volunteered an immediate attack; order under special cipher of the King, 18 June 1857, PP 1859 (1st Sess.), xviii. 161.

[52] Greathed, *Letters*, pp. 59–60: 'The attack was a bold one, and obstinately persisted in; but it was not supported, fortunately, as it should have been by the attack in front; and I believe there is a split between the old and the new mutineers on the point of fighting, and the latter were left to their resources, as they reproached the former with want of courage.'

the rear of the British camp, but because of the shrewdly timed demolition by the British of a bridge over the canal, the rebels were unable to advance their guns. In consequence the entire weight of the attack was thrown once more against Hindu Rao's. This, the key to the Ridge and the whole British position, continued to be held by mainly Indian troops—the Sirmur Gurkhas, the Guides (principally Sikhs), with merely a thickening of two companies of British troops of the 60th Rifles. The action of 23 June was thus for the most part an Indian fight and showed what disciplined Indian valour could do against undisciplined. As Reid described the action:

> The mutineers, about twelve o'clock, made a most desperate attack on the whole of my position. No men could have fought better. They charged the Rifles, the Guides and my own men [the Gurkhas] again and again, and at one time I thought I must have lost the day. The cannonade from the city, and the heavy guns which they had brought out, raged fast and furious and completely enfiladed the whole of my position. Thousands were brought against my mere handful of men; but I knew the importance of my position, and was determined to do my utmost to hold it till reinforcements arrived.[53]

Fending off such attacks exacted its toll of the small British force. On 19 June its losses were 100 casualties, on 23 June, 160. 'It was one of those victories', as Kaye wrote, 'of which a few more repetitions would have turned our position into a graveyard, on which the enemy might have quietly encamped.'[54] The substantial reinforcements for which General Barnard had been waiting to complete his plan for taking the city began to arrive from 26 June, but the assault had again to be put off because of the contemporaneous arrival of the Bareilly brigade in the rebel camp. This was the largest single reinforcement the rebels received, consisting of four infantry regiments, one irregular cavalry regiment, and a horse artillery battery, a total of some 2,300 fighting men.[55] In accordance with what was now established practice, the new arrivals were required to show their fighting mettle without delay. But their sortie in strength on 3 July was a very circumspect affair, Bakht Khan, the Bareilly 'general', being careful not to get embroiled in close-quarter fighting. On 9 July they came out again 'in great force' with nine guns and cavalry in support. A body of some 150

[53] Reid, *Extracts from Letters*, cited Kaye, *Sepoy War*, ii. 555 n.
[54] Kaye, *Sepoy War*, i. 556.
[55] J. C. Wilson's report, *NE* i. 415.

to 200 horsemen got through to the British camp, causing considerable confusion for a time, but the most serious fighting took place in the gardens and enclosures of the Sabzi Mandi suburb lying immediately below Hindu Rao's. On 14 July, Hindu Rao's and the Sabzi Mandi picquet once more came under fierce attack by a force 'believed to consist of twenty regiments of infantry, a large body of cavalry, and several field pieces, and supported by a heavy fire of artillery from the walls'.[56]

On both these latter occasions the British refused to be bearded indefinitely by the rebel fire and could not resist sending out columns to clear the suburbs. This 'rat-hunting', as the British termed the pitiless close-quarter fighting, was pursued right up to the walls of the city. Heavy loss was inflicted on the rebels, the field guns accompanying the British columns probably doing the most serious execution.[57] Yet on each occasion the British were left to rue the savage impetuosity with which they carried the fight literally to the enemy's gates. On 9 July, their casualties were over 220, on 14 July over 200. The vital Sirmur Gurkhas were down to half their numbers. A campaign of attrition was one the British could not hope to win; and the reinforcements of a fortnight earlier were being frittered away. The strain began to show itself in deteriorating European fighting morale and discipline:

> The never-ending game of leaving our own position to fight the enemy in theirs, was getting more and more intolerable to every one. The men grumbled roughly, in the hearing of their officers, at the way their lives were wasted, and sometimes could not be got to advance. Men and officers were too often mixed up together; discipline was getting very much relaxed . . . This loss of authority was noticed as much in the Queen's regiments as in those of the Company . . .[58]

The British—except for the crack 60th Rifles—discarded their uniform, one unit priding itself on its soubriquet of 'Dirty Shirts'. They also discarded the tight formal formation fighting, their pursuing columns breaking up into loose, ill-controlled detachments fighting in the gardens and enclosures of the suburbs and retiring in

[56] Maj.-Gen. T. Reed to Mily. Secr. Govt. of India, 16 July 1857; Forrest, *State Papers*, i. 320. According to spies' reports, most of the rebel force which came out of the city remained in support in Teliwara while the attack was delivered by two regiments of the Rohilkhand brigade.

[57] Spies' reports gave rebel casualties on 14 July as 1,000.

[58] Ireland, *Siege of Delhi*, pp. 174–5.

a straggling manner. A sure sign of weakening discipline was the failure to check the British troops committing senseless atrocities on their own Indian non-combatant camp followers when the fighting had not gone their way. Wreaking their spite out of blind racial hatred in this fashion showed how badly nerves were frayed: 'so many sanguinary fights and executions had brutalised our men, who now regarded the life of a native as of less value than the meanest of animals'.[59] The glamour had gone out of the fighting, and the dirtiness of warfare in which no quarter was given and no prisoners taken stood as naked to the senses as the stench of manure and rotting animal carcasses around the British camp.[60]

Despite the failure of the incessant sepoy attacks, they were successful in one respect. They caused the British to postpone the assault on the city owing to the mounting toll of casualties. Even the chief engineer, Baird Smith, its most persistent advocate, acknowledged that after the action of 14 July the assault had to be put off until the British force had been adequately strengthened and a full train of siege artillery brought into position. A new defensive posture was now adopted on the orders of Archdale Wilson, who took over the command in July. Rebel attacks were henceforth to be met behind improved breastworks and the tactic of the counter-attack generally abandoned. The British position was rendered less accessible by the permanent occupation of the remainder of the Sabzi Mandi suburb, and the systematic demolition of the bridges across the Najafgarh Drain on the west of the city. The rebels could not now turn the exposed British right flank and pass a force immediately to the rear of the British camp, so that they were increasingly confined to butting their heads in renewed frontal assaults on the Ridge position. The remaining alternative was to take their courage in their hands and send out a large force at a distance from Delhi with the purpose of making a wide detour and cutting the vital supply line of the Grand Trunk Road in the region of Alipur, some ten miles north of the British encampment. Such a move was seen to be of importance by the King and the senior rebel commanders but the political and military difficulties

[59] *Idem*, p. 159. On the adoption of nondescript uniform and the 'Dirty Shirts', C. J. Griffiths, *A Narrative of the Siege of Delhi* (London, 1910), pp. 114–15.

[60] Cf. Griffiths, *Siege of Delhi*, p. 99: '. . . it was on our part a fight for existence, a war of extermination, in which no prisoners taken and no mercy shown—in short, one of the most cruel and vindictive wars that the world has seen'. On conditions in the British camp, Ireland, *Siege of Delhi*, p. 130.

of mounting such an expedition prevented swift action. In the meantime, rebel spirits were kept up by fresh accessions of mutineers. This constant flow of reinforcements was in the long term a dubious asset since it compounded the already grave problems of paying and supplying the rebel army. Yet for the moment it provided fresh troops to contend against the war-worn British forces.

On 16 July 800 infantry, some cavalry, and three guns were reported as arriving from Jhansi and probably took part in the attack of 18 July.[61] Yet the most important and indeed the last contingent of any size to join the Delhi rebels was the Nimach brigade which arrived outside the city on 26 July, and comprised four infantry regiments, one cavalry regiment, and one troop of horse artillery.[62] It had taken some heavy punishment in fighting the British outside Agra on 6 July; yet since the British had retired in some disorder into Agra fort when their ammunition ran low, the rebels had been left in possession of the battlefield and counted the battle honours theirs. Now arrived at Delhi, they were given the task of putting the plan of a grand encircling movement into effect. On 31 July a large force of 'several thousand men with ten field guns and three mortars' moved out westwards along the Rohtak road. Caught in torrential rain, they found it impossible to throw a bridge across the Najafgarh Drain, and the idea of a concerted attack on the front and rear of the British had to be abandoned. Returning to the city on 1 August, the sacred day of the Muslim *Id* festival, they joined the other rebel forces in a hastily improvised attack that evening on Hindu Rao's or the Main Picquet, now connected in a system of scientifically constructed breastworks with its forward post at the 'Sammy House'. All night the attack was sustained and in the morning fresh rebel reinforcements were brought up. Despite fierce persistence and a readiness to take punishing casualties, the rebels could not get nearer than twenty paces to their objective in the face of the controlled musketry fire and grape that met their charges. It was a triumph for the new defensive tactics of the British, the rebels losing probably a thousand men or more to the 46 casualties of the British. Henry Daly of the Guides considered

61 Young, *Delhi*, pp. 133, 136; PP 1859 (1st Sess.), xviii. 219.

62 Estimates of the size of the Nimach brigade vary considerably. Jiwan Lal recorded on 25 July that it comprised 'four regiments of native infantry, 1,700 cavalry, with several lakhs of rupees, several fieldpieces, and forty elephants'; *TNN*, p. 166. Rajab Ali's account agrees except that he gives the cavalry as only one regiment; *FSUP* v. 1009. Norman's estimate of the force is lower.

this 'the most successful and scientific drubbing we have shown Pandy. His loss has been great; his ammunition has been expended by cartloads; he has never seen our men. These are the lessons we should teach when acting on the defensive. Pursuing brings us loss when we have to return.'[63] Again it was a question of the absence among the rebels not of the offensive spirit but of a tactical plan or controlling mind and of disciplined organization to press home the assault. Years later Griffiths testified to their 'persistent courage':

> It speaks well for the prowess of the mutineers, and proves that we had no contemptible foe to deal with, that so many sorties and attacks were made by them during the siege. They amounted in all to thirty-six—all of these being regularly organized actions and assaults—besides innumerable others on isolated pickets and advanced posts. They seldom came to close quarters with our men, and then only when surprised; but nothing could exceed their persistent courage in fighting almost every day, and though beaten on every occasion with frightful loss, returning over and over again to renew the combat.[64]

The political officer with the Delhi Force, H. H. Greathed, was quick to understand the importance of this last rebel failure. He noted that 'the accoutrements found on the dead that were left showed that the Neemuch force had to bear the brunt; so they have now all had their turn of defeat, and must be at a loss what to do next'.[65] The sepoy war had passed its climacteric. At its pivotal point, Delhi, it had used up separately and in detail the fighting morale and organization of its constituent units, who had cast themselves away in fruitless attacks on prepared positions instead of allowing their enemy so inferior in numbers to consume himself in this very fashion. In early August, the Delhi rebels still composed a formidable mass of fighting men, but their effective strength was ebbing away long before the British were ready to go over to the offensive and deliver their assault. Already on 5 August there were reports of regiments leaving Delhi, disheartened by lack of success and by mounting difficulties over pay and provisions:

[63] Daly, *Memoirs of Gen. Sir H. D. Daly*, p. 166. As the rebels succeeded in carrying off most of their dead and wounded, their casualties are uncertain. Young said they were variously stated in the city as between 500 and 3,000, but himself thought 1,000 to 1,200 the more likely figure; Young, *Delhi*, p. 173. British casualties are taken from the official British report, Forrest, *State Papers*, i. 345. For an account of the action, see Reid's dispatch 4 Aug. 1857, PP 1857–8, xliv, pt. 1, pp. 268–9.

[64] Griffiths, *Siege of Delhi*, p. 108.

[65] Greathed, *Letters*, p. 165; Young, *Delhi*, p. 172.

The enemy is said to be greatly disheartened by the results of the actions of the 2nd and 3rd [August], and numbers are now reported to be leaving the city. The Neemuch and Naseerabad Brigade has lost 900 since the action, of which the majority are deserters. The rumours of reinforcements coming to us also produce their effect, and there can be no doubt that the spirit of the Mutiny is dying out.[66]

A new sense of desperation produced its own fitful belligerence. Having failed in direct assaults, the rebels turned to the one form of action in which they still enjoyed equality if not superiority. While their infantry limited itself to a sniping role, their guns and rockets poured a storm of fire on to the British position for five days beginning on 6 August. New rebel field batteries were set up outside the city walls in Ludlow Castle and Kishanganj; the British succeeded in destroying the former in a surprise large-scale raid on 12 August but the Kishanganj battery proved much more obdurate and was never effectively silenced. The British were by now, however, too well dug in behind breastworks to be worn down by artillery fire. The sands in the hour-glass were running out. On 14 August the Movable Column under Nicholson came into the British camp, increasing its strength by half as much again; and behind it men knew the siege train was making its ponderous way.

It might be supposed that from the end of July, as sepoy fortunes began to droop, rebellion at Delhi would have taken on a more decidedly civil character. By then no unified military command had emerged. After his arrival with the Bareilly brigade on 1 July, Muhammad Bakht Khan had failed to consolidate his position as commander-in-chief. Probably he needed a transparent military success to achieve this, but there were other obstacles he failed to surmount. At first some of the sepoys already in Delhi appear to have left their regiments to join Bakht Khan's brigade, doubtless attracted by its prestige and the four lakhs of treasure it was reputed to have brought with it.[67] Yet the Bareilly general's refusal to put the money into the common treasury alienated the remainder. Hence the King's most prominent son, Mirza Mughal (Mirza Muhammad Zohur-ud-din), succeeded in retaining the formal

[66] H. M. Vibart, *Richard Baird Smith. The Leader of the Delhi Heroes of 1857* (Westminster, 1897), pp. 109–10. Also, cf. *TNN*, p. 178.

[67] *Press List of Mutiny Papers* (Imperial Record Department, Calcutta, 1921), p. 179, item 93/49, and p. 272, item 111/41.

allegiance of what was loosely called the City brigade, which comprised the Meerut and Delhi regiments, the King's own forces, as well as the portions of regiments that had come in from the Punjab and elsewhere. The King had welcomed Bakht Khan's arrival to supply a counterweight to the overweening pretensions of the princes and a means to rescue himself and the city from the turbulence and insolence of the Meerut and Delhi sepoys. But while vesting Bakht Khan with full authority, he was in no position to make that authority effective. What shadowy power was wielded by the octogenarian pensionary was as an arbiter among the deadlocked palace and military factions.

The hope that Bakht Khan would prove the great military leader and soldier of genius for which the rebel movement longed was quickly dispelled by the fruitlessness of his expedition towards Alipur on 3 July and the attack on the Ridge on 9 July. Already by 15 July the King felt it politic to demote him formally from the appointment of commander-in-chief, but titles conferred by the King meant little enough.[68] Mirza Mughal had not ceased to use the title of commander-in-chief on Bakht Khan's appointment, and Bakht Khan continued to use it when convenient. In any event, he remained the dominant figure on the military side. At the outset it seems that his ambition was to take over the civil as well as the military leadership of the revolt and he pestered the King to recognize his claim to royal ancestry.[69] Even after his supposed demotion, it was evident that he attached importance to the continued use of the title of governor-general (Sahib-i-Alam Bahadur).[70] This may have had some immediate value as giving him a show of authority in his efforts to collect revenue directly from the countryside on the southern side of the city. What happened to the four lakhs it was generally believed he had brought with him is unclear, but by the end of July the Bareilly troops were said to be disheartened and demanding their pay.[71] Bakht Khan's military operations were directly affected. He was evidently one of those who understood the folly of frittering away rebel power in almost daily attacks on the Ridge and the importance of husbanding resources for a pincer

[68] *TNN*, p. 152. Also *Delhi News*, 18 July, *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 1, p. 243.

[69] *TNN*, pp. 134, 146.

[70] According to Jiwan Lal, the King formally accorded Bakht Khan this title on 26 July, *TNN*, p. 167.

[71] *Delhi News*, 28 July; *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 1, p. 282.

movement that would envelope the rear of the British position. Yet his conduct lost him coadjutors. His failure to give support to the Nimach brigade in the desperate fighting at Hindu Rao's on 2 and 3 August must have been one of the reasons for the bitter hostility that sprang up between the two brigades. By 8 August, open resentment was being expressed at his efforts to collect revenue on his own account, and yet until he could pay his troops he could not restore their fighting morale for the long-planned and hazardous expedition to Alipur.[72] It soon became apparent that revenue was not to be had from the surrounding countryside without fighting, and that the magnates of the region, like the raja of Ballabgarh, the nawabs of Jhajjar, Dadri (Bahadurgarh), Farrukhnagar, Rewari, and Pataudi, all of whom possessed small armed forces, could not readily be brushed aside. Ahsanullah Khan, the King's physician and adviser, stated afterwards at the King's trial that Bakht Khan had appointed *tahsildars* at Palwa, Hodul, and Shahdarah, and a *ziladar* at Gurgaon, but that no revenue had been collected.[73]

By mid-August, Bakht Khan was again attempting to raise money in the city; he obtained a royal order giving him power to negotiate directly with the Delhi bankers and suspending the King's son, Mirza Khizr (Khair), from all financial functions. It was to no avail. Despite coercive measures—he placed rajas Devi Singh and Saligram, the two leading bankers, in confinement—he was unable to extort more than Rs. 6,000.[74] The current of feeling in the rest of the army ran strongly against him. His military plans aroused the suspicions of the Nimach commander, Gauri Shankar, and the cavalry commander, Talyar Khan, that he 'was in secret communication with the English, and it was understood that he had arranged to draw off his force to attack Alipur, and then the English would attack Delhi unopposed'.[75] On 23 August, the officers of the Nimach brigade were even broaching a plot to disarm the Bareilly troops. With such fierce internal dissension in the army, the princes were able to nerve the bankers to resist military pressure and to

[72] *Delhi News*, 4–8 Aug., *idem*, p. 315. For bad relations between the Bareilly and Nimach brigades, *TNN*, p. 174, entry for 30 July. On Bakht Khan's lack of support, *Press List*, p. 24, item 57/230 dated 2 Aug.

[73] PP 1859 (1st Sess.), xviii. 278.

[74] *TNN*, pp. 199–200, entries for 18 and 19 Aug. Authority to collect revenue from the country and obtain a loan from the bankers was vested in the Military Court, not Bakht Khan, according to an apparently authentic document, dated 19 Aug., under the King's autograph cipher, PP 1859 (1st Sess.), xviii. 152–3.

[75] *TNN*, p. 200.

keep the machinery of financial negotiation under their own control. Mirza Mughal and Mirza Khizr Sultan appear to have held another trump card: they controlled the magazine on which Bakht Khan, usually through the King's good offices, was dependent for replenishing his artillery and ammunition.[76] Finding himself dangerously isolated and his own men again muttering against him, Bakht Khan was forced to temporize.[77] On the day the Nimach troops were proposing to overthrow him, he went to the palace and 'in the presence of all the principal officers of the Army, and of Mirza Mogul, swore upon the Koran that he had opened no negotiations with the English'.[78] It was now agreed that he should proceed on the expedition to Alipur, a move that the King had been urging vehemently in order to prevent the arrival of the British siege train. A bold move seemed in any event imperative to bolster failing morale. Desertions from the rebel ranks had commenced in late July. In the third week of August as the crisis over army pay became intense, they suddenly grew to serious proportions.[79]

It might be supposed that the time had long since come to give rebellion a more popular character and to call upon those elements outside the army who harboured a fierce hatred of white *kaffir* rule. Given the circumstances of Delhi, with a Muslim king and a population (of some 160,000) nearly half Muslim, this meant turning the rebellion into a predominantly Islamic crusade.[80] Yet Bahadur Shah would have nothing to do with such a policy. Even in the early days he showed that he was determined not to add communal dissension to the problems plaguing the city and the rebel movement. Despite his reputation for piety, he was no intolerant zealot, and before 1857 it had been his custom to celebrate the Hindu festival

[76] As early as 29 July the Court of Mutineers was informing Khizr Sultan of the shortage of ammunition, *Press List*, p. 19, item 57/39. Bakht Khan made large demands for guns and ammunition on 4 Aug., stating that he had already done so on three earlier occasions without result, PP 1859 (1st Sess.), xviii. 167. Also *Press List*, p. 23, item 57/179. At the end in the final crisis Bakht Khan made his demands direct to Mirza Mughal as commander-in-chief instead of to the King, *Press List*, pp. 32, 34, items 57/460 and 57/500 dated 10 and 13 Sept.

[77] *TNN*, p. 200. On Bakht Khan's departure *en route* for Najafgarh with the Nimach brigade on 24 Aug., the King formally restored full financial powers to Mirza Khizr Sultan, PP 1859 (1st Sess.), xviii. 222.

[78] *TNN*, p. 205, entry for 23 Aug.

[79] Reports of desertions, *TNN*, pp. 178, 195, 200; *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 1, pp. 384, 317, 319; *Press List*, p. 3, items 15/6 and 15/10.

[80] For population of Delhi in 1857, Percival Spear, *Twilight of the Mughuls* (Cambridge, 1951), p. 194.

of Holi at Mahrauli.[81] On 19 May Maulavi Muhammad Sayyid and others erected the green standard of holy war on the city's great mosque, the Jama Masjid, but the King successfully ordered its removal on the grounds that 'such a jehad was quite impossible and such an idea an act of extreme folly, for the majority of the Purbeah soldiers were Hindus'.[82] Communal tension flared up again at the approach of the *Baqr-Id* (*Id-ul-Zuhar*), the Hindu sepoys putting five butchers to death for cow killing on 29 July. Bahadur Shah again grew insistent that strict orders should be promulgated against any sacrifice of cows and goats during the festival, and secured Bakht Khan's co-operation in having the death penalty for such an offence proclaimed by beat of drum.[83]

Yet paradoxically Bakht Khan seems to have been one of the keenest advocates of harnessing Islam to the cause of rebellion. Ahsanullah Khan declared in evidence at the King's trial that Bakht Khan was a Wahhabi and had given active encouragement to the Wahhabi volunteers. The term may well have been used in the loose sense of a Muslim zealot rather than in its more specific sense to denote the militant tendency founded by Sayyid Ahmad of Bareilly whose members mainly abstained from violence in 1857.[84] Bakht Khan's Bareilly brigade had been accompanied to Delhi by 'three or four thousand ghazis' or fanatical warriors under Maulavi Sarfaraz Ali; and on 21 July these were joined in the city by 600 *jihadis* (holy warriors) from Tonk—the only Muslim-ruled state in Rajputana—with the news that 2,000 more were on the way.[85] When a count was taken at the end of the month, total numbers of *ghazis* had swelled to 7,000, many having come in from the nearby districts of Hansi and Hissar as well as more distant parts like Jaipur and Bhopal.[86] On his arrival at Delhi, Bakht Khan was said

[81] *Idem*, p. 195. Also B. R. Nanda, *The Nehrus: Motilal and Jawaharlal* (London, 1962), pp. 182 ff.

[82] *TNN*, p. 98. Also Chunni Lal's newsletter, 19 and 20 May 1857, PP 1859 (1st Sess.), xviii. 218.

[83] *TNN*, p. 170. Also *FSUP* i. 421–3.

[84] Ahsanullah's evidence, PP 1859 (1st Sess.), xviii. 279. Also Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (London, 1964), pp. 209 ff., and *Islamic Modernisation in India and Pakistan, 1857–1964* (London, 1967), p. 28. Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 82–3.

[85] Narrative of Sayyid Mubarak Shah, cited Edwardes, *Red Year*, p. 207; *TNN*, p. 160. Tonk was the state founded by Amir Khan, the Pindari chief, among whose troops Sayyid Ahmad Bareilly, the Wahhabi leader, took service; Hardy, *Muslims of British India*, p. 51.

[86] *Delhi News*, 28 July, *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 1, p. 279. On 25 June 400 *jihadis* were reported from Gurgaon and other districts, *TNN*, p. 127.

to have 'assembled the Mahomedans and compelled the moulvies to give in "fatwas" [pronouncements] enjoining upon Mahomedans the duty of making religious war upon the British'.[87] He also constituted Sarfaraz Ali leader of the religious warriors and gained him a place at the royal council.[88] Other reported Wahhabis were Muhammad Shafi and Maulavi Imam Khan, both cavalry officers and prominent among the subordinate commanders.

The King at no time showed enthusiasm for recruiting irregular forces. He had endeavoured to restrain Mirza Mughal from enlisting the numerous volunteers that flocked into Delhi at the beginning of the struggle, considering these would only add to his financial and other difficulties.[89] On 3 August, perhaps dejected by the failure of the *Baqr-Id* offensive, he scorned the offer of assistance from 6,000 *ghazis* of Nasirabad, dictating the reply: 'Say there are 60,000 men in Delhi, and they have not yet driven the English away from the Ridge; what can your 6,000 do?'[90] Admittedly on 11 August Falak-u-din Shah, a *ghazi*, was given a formal letter of authority 'to collect ghazis as well as money for the armies bestowed by God, which have come from all directions, and have assembled at the royal threshold for the destruction of the Christians'. Yet there is every reason to believe that this document, without the royal signature, cipher, or seal, emanated from Bakht Khan's office and was in the handwriting of his clerk.[91]

While from the ranks of the *ghazis* were drawn men of fanatical courage who were prepared to go out with the sepoys in attacks on the enemy, their general military value was limited. They came without firearms and required provisioning and nominal pay. How many were genuine religious enthusiasts and how many *wilayatis* or Afghan soldiers of fortune from the princely courts of Rajputana and central India where they clustered thickly, it is impossible to say. Sayyid Mubarak Shah was scornful of their pretensions, but he wrote his narrative as a suppliant for British clemency after having taken service as a police-officer (*kotwal*) under the rebel regime. 'Their stated object', he wrote of the *ghazis*, 'was a crusade against

[87] Evidence of Ahsanullah Khan, PP 1859 (1st Sess.), xviii. 279.

[88] Sayyid Mubarak Shah, cited Edwardes, *Red Year*, p. 212. Also *Delhi News*, 1 Sept., *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 2, p. 8.

[89] Mirza Mughal to King and reply, n.d., PP 1859 (1st Sess.), xviii. 172–4.

[90] *TNN*, p. 179.

[91] Ahsanullah's evidence, PP 1859 (1st Sess.), xviii. 176, 178.

the infidel, their real one was plunder.'[92] The King is said to have given them each two annas a day, but on 31 July when they complained that they were dying of hunger, the King told them he had no money to feed them and hit upon the idea of making leading citizens responsible for their maintenance.[93] These were not the conditions under which a volunteer force could thrive, and it is hardly surprising that in the wave of desertions that occurred in the third week of August many of them should have quit.

The latter part of August found the rebel movement in Delhi not only low-spirited and riven with factional disputes but lacking any decided character or leadership. Because of their numbers and their arms, the sepoys remained the dominant element, but there was no unified command organization. All that had been created in that direction was the so-called Mutineers' or Military Court. At times of bitter dispute, this occasionally played something of a political role, but for the most part it was little more than a military liaison committee through which Mirza Mughal could transmit his 'instructions' and the army conduct its relations with the civil authorities. Bakht Khan had little to do with it and endeavoured as far as possible to keep his own force separate.[94] In any event, it was incapable of becoming an instrument of collective leadership or even the forum of political and strategic debate. The royal durbar had to perform this latter function in the absence of any one person, civil or military, who possessed unquestioned and undivided authority. Yet its effective power was steadily diminishing. With negligible sums having been collected from the countryside, with no liberated hinterland having been created to renew the city's strength, and with the merchants and bankers having been squeezed almost dry, the rebels were being deprived of the essential sinews of war while the British sat quiet on the Ridge.

[92] Sayyid Mubarak Shah, cited Edwardes, *Red Year*, p. 220. Also petition of Ghulam Mu'id-ud-din Khan to the King, 2 Aug. 1857, PP 1859 (1st Sess.), xviii. 167.

[93] *TNN*, p. 175. Cf. Greathed to Colvin, 7 Aug. 1857: 'The Ghazees are going home, they get nothing to eat' (*Enclosures to Secret Letters from India*, vol. 154, f. 454).

[94] Complaint of the Military Court to Bakht Khan, cited N. K. Nigam, *Delhi in 1857* (Delhi, 1957), p. 104. It is noticeable that the papers by the British in the Red Fort belonging to Mirza Mughal's office as 'commander-in-chief' contained almost no instructions or correspondence with units of the Bareilly brigade; *Press List*, *passim*. On the history and function of the Military Court, see Nigam, Appendix A.

It was in these parlous circumstances that a final throw was attempted. From 14 August onwards, amidst the distractions of factional squabbling among the senior commanders and princes, and against a background of serious desertions, the long-talked-of expedition to Alipur was put in hand. The original plan had envisaged a pincer movement, one column proceeding up the east bank of the Jumna to Baghpat and the other making a wide sweep on the west via Najafgarh where the bridge across the Drain was still intact. Ultimately the Baghpat column was abandoned, although on 21 August the Jhansi brigade made off to assist nawab Walidad Khan at Malagarh, near Bulandshahr, and never returned.[95] On 24 August Bakht Khan left with the Bareilly brigade, estimated by the British at 6,000 men, and was followed the next morning by the Nimach brigade in somewhat smaller numbers. Bakht Khan halted at Palam (the site of the present international airport), but probably continuing mutual hostility prompted Sirdhari Singh to push on alone with the Nimach force to Najafgarh. Here he was caught by Nicholson, who had come out from the British camp with a column of 1,600 infantry, half European, and a strong horse artillery and cavalry contingent.[96] The Nimach brigade had ensconced themselves in a strong defensive position, but their numbers, some 4,000 or so, were over-extended along one and a half miles of front and were not anticipating an attack at the end of a day of monsoon downpour. Nicholson allowed no pause. He opened at once with a brief, sharp artillery onslaught on the central strong point, a fortified serai, and followed immediately with a bayonet assault that carried the serai and turned the whole rebel position by enabling his men to sweep down the line of rebel guns. The fighting spirit evinced by the Nimach men was extraordinarily varied. At the serai, Edward Vibart recalled later: 'Only a few of the rebels fought with any pluck and these were seen standing on the walls, loading and firing with great deliberation, until we were close upon them.'[97] Yet

[95] *Delhi News*, 16 Aug., *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 2, pp. 18–19. On desertions from mid-August, Jiwan Lal, 15 and 19 Aug., *TNN*, pp. 145, 200; Greathed, *Letters*, pp. 408, 419; *Delhi News*, 17 and 19 Aug., *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 2, pp. 384, 417, 419; spies' reports 16 and 23 Aug., *Press List*, p. 3, items 15/6, and 15/10. On move of Jhansi force to Malagarh, Greathed's report; Muir, *Intelligence Records*, i. 482; *TNN*, pp. 202–3; *Enclosures to Secret Letters from India*, vol. 155, f 559.

[96] *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 1, pp. 419, 434; *TNN*, pp. 206–8; Young, *Delhi*, p. 234; Norman's report, Forrest, *State Papers*, i. 464–5.

[97] Edward Vibart, *The Sepoy Mutiny as seen by a Subaltern from Delhi to Lucknow* (London, 1898), p. 139.

despite this easy win at the serai and nearby posts, at which the rebel guns were overrun, the British then ran unexpectedly into resistance so formidable at the immediately adjacent village of Nagli Sakraoti that they were unable to overcome it. They gained possession next day only after the rebels, having lost all their artillery, decided to make off in the night.

Rebel losses were not unduly heavy, some three or four hundred, but the blow to morale could not be disguised. The move on Alipur had to be abandoned and at first only some 600 dispirited men limped back into Delhi, the rest lying up in villages.[98] Fierce recrimination over responsibility for the disaster ensued, followed by a tempestuous crisis over pay on 1 September, when three rebel regiments were drawn up ready to sack the city if money were not immediately forthcoming. Mirza Mughal and Mirza Khizr Sultan, whom the sepoys furiously denounced for defalcation, were pushed aside from the role as paymaster, and a committee of Muslim notables succeeded in raising sufficient money to make an interim payment the next day. Violence was avoided but the affair dragged on, the officers of the Nasirabad troops importuning the King on 3 September, and, on 6 and 7 September, Bakht Khan coming with ten of his officers to complain 'that the men of his force had not received one pice [farthing] of pay from the day that it had entered Delhi; that the men were very discontented and threatened to leave for their homes'.[99]

Yet a strong apprehension now took hold that stifled these internal altercations, an awareness of the doom awaiting the city itself and all that it contained. Like geese flying before the storm, Jiwan Lal reported on 1 September 'a great exodus from the city today of all the clerk and writer class, through fear'.[100] In the early hours of 4 September, the stately slow-gaited elephants of the siege train hauled the long-awaited guns into the British camps. On 8 September the first battery, armed and unmasked, opened a devastating cannonade against the rebel gun emplacements on the

[98] *Delhi News*, 29 Aug. 1857, *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 2, p. 2. Torab Ali reported that the Nimach brigade had lost 800 men, most of them hiding in villages; *Delhi News*, 1 Sept., *idem*, p. 9. Sayyid Mubarak Shah asserted: 'On that day 470 of the Nimach brigade, Horse, Foot and Artillery, were killed by grape alone' (Edwardes, *Red Year*, p. 224).

[99] *TNN*, pp. 215–17, 219, 223, 224. *Delhi News*, 2 Sept., *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 2, pp. 15–19.

[100] *TNN*, p. 216.

Mori bastion, and within a few days sixty heavy guns and mortars in full-throated roar were pounding the northern face of the city. The inhabitants confronted the coming British assault in a mood of desperation. In mid-August men of education like the *maulavi* Fazl Haq (later to be hanged) had learned from English newspapers of the merciless vengeance the British proposed to exact.[101] Even Palmerston, the British prime minister, had applauded the idea of razing the city to the ground, and a former governor-general, Ellenborough, could fling out coarse threats 'to emasculate all the mutineers and to call Delhi Eunuchabad'. The philosophic Macaulay in his quiet literary retreat on Campden Hill recorded that until that year he 'did not know what real vindictive hatred meant'; while Oliver Wendell Holmes summed up the ugly public mood in Britain and America: 'England takes down the Map of the World, which she has girdled with empire, and makes a correction thus: DELHI. *Dele.* The civilised world says, Amen!'[102]

In the final hour of crisis, Bahadur Shah issued an appeal for all to unite against the white man, on 6 September ordering the chief *kotwal* (police officer) to have proclaimed by beat of drum that:

> this is a religious war and is being prosecuted on account of the faith, and that it behoves all Hindu and Mussulman residents of the imperial city, or of the villages out in the country, as well as those natives of Hindustan who are arrayed against us on the ridge, or are anywhere employed on the side of the armies of the English, whether they be men of the eastern countries or Sikhs or foreigners, or natives of the Himalaya Hills, or Nepaulese, to continue true to their faiths and creeds, and to slay the English and their servants.[103]

[101] *TNN*, p. 198.

[102] G. O. Trevelyan, *Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay* (London, 1908), pp. 655, 657. Vernon Smith to Canning, 10 Sept., 26 Oct., and 10 Nov. 1857: Canning Papers, 'Letters from the Pres. of the Bd. of Control', vol. 4, nos. 38, 41, 42. Palmerston, who had disapproved of Canning's 'clemency' proclamation, wrote more deliberately on 9 October before the recovery of Delhi was known, that in his opinion 'every civil building connected with Mahomedan tradition should be levelled with the ground without regard to antiquarian veneration or artistic predilections'. Canning fell in with these views, proposing on 25 November to destroy the city walls and 'to pull down the Palace [presumably the entire Red Fort was meant] with the exception of the "Dewan Khas" which has some beauty and which if left standing alone amongst the ruins will point the moral'; Palmerston to Canning, 9 Oct. 1857; Canning to Vernon Smith, 25 Nov. 1857; Canning Papers, vol. ii, No. 9 and vol. xxxii, No. 93. Fortunately John Lawrence's stern views on the cost of demolition and the military utility of preserving the Red Fort and city walls prevailed, but great damage was done. Cf. Spear, *Twilight of the Mughals*, pp. 220–2, and *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 2, pp. 196 ff.

[103] PP 1859 (1st Sess.), xviii. 252. Also *Press List*, p. 5, item 16/20.

Inevitably it was the Muslim faithful under their *maulavis* who largely responded. Imdad Ali Khan, one of Bakht Khan's supporters, who used to sit at the King's side at the durbar, was said to have displayed great bravery in the attack on the new breaching battery on 8 September.[104] When the latter opened on 11 September, silencing the guns on the Kashmir bastion and bringing down huge sections of the curtain wall, the rebels poured out a storm of musketry from their forward trenches and skirmishers in front of the walls. Gauri Shankar, a British spy, reported next day that 'The citizens took part in yesterday's fight, and Moulvee Nawazish Ali of Habree in the Thaneisur District, with 2,000 men, went out to battle'.[105] Yet what untrained men, or even brave old harridans, could do against a foe who advanced his siege batteries with a scientific system of approaches and breastworks, was little enough at this stage. Their fighting spirit would have been better kept in reserve for the coming struggle within the city itself, although Sayyid Mubarak Shah was unduly contemptuous of their efforts. The *ghazis*, he reported, had collected on the Friday (11 September) in great numbers and made a brave show, marching along the Chandni Chowk and shouting: 'Citizens, citizens, all who would be martyrs for the faith, come follow us.' Two hours later they had returned, having found themselves powerless to advance against 'the fire from the batteries and the ceaseless volleys of musketry'.[106]

The British chose to believe for the purposes of sustaining their own morale and later of constructing their national mythology that in delivering the final assault against Delhi on 14 September they were but a 'gallant few, of whom England should in very truth be everlastingly proud, [who] stormed in the face of the day a strong fortress defended by 30,000 desperate men, provided with everything necessary to defy assault'. In fact British inferiority in numbers was nothing like so great nor their courage and fighting ability so formidable as they fondly imagined. From mid-August the estimated numbers of the rebels in the city had diminished significantly as a result of desertions. Hervey Greathed, the political

[104] *TNN*, p. 226; *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 2, pp. 8–9; Medley, *A Year's Campaigning*, p. 78.

[105] *Delhi News*, 12 Sept., *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 2, p. 33. For other indications of the citizenry being organized, see Mohd. Sarfaraz Ali to Court, 10 Sept., *Press List*, p. 104, item 65/36. Also 11 Sept., *idem*, p. 5, item 16/27.

[106] Mubarak Shah, cited Edwardes, *Red Year*, pp. 228–9. On the women fighters, *idem*, p. 221.

officer with the Delhi Field Force, wrote to his wife on 19 August that at one time the rebel army was said to have numbered 35,000, and with fanatics, etc., to amount to 50–60,000. The latter class had, however, vanished as they could get no food, and the current estimate of rebel numbers was some 20,000 trained men with an armed population at their backs. By the eve of the assault, these numbers had again fallen sharply. On 13 September, Col. Keith Young, a member of General Wilson's staff, could report that 'the enemy, though 40,000 strong at one time, have not now more than 10,000 or 12,000, so we ought to beat them'. If Young was correct, the British had in fact obtained parity of numbers, for to their 9,000 effectives (including gun lascars, drivers, etc.) had to be added the 3,000 men or so of the contingents supplied by the rajas of Kashmir (Jammu) and Jhind.[107]

The British had, of course, to divide their force between the assault columns totalling some 6,800, less than a third of whom were European, and a small body of men left to defend the camp.[108] Yet so had the rebels. Their strategy depended for its success upon preventing the British encircling the city on the west and south by the retention of a firm hold of the hill suburbs of Kishanganj and Paharganj. From this strong base the rebel counter-attack would be launched against the Ridge and British camp once the British assault columns were fully committed in fighting along the city's northern face. Indeed, this was the hinge on which success or failure turned. For the shattering effect of the siege artillery in silencing the rebel guns on the bastions and smashing the parapet along the curtain walls had largely destroyed their defensive capabilities and rendered British entry relatively easy.

[107] Greathed, *Letters*, p. 206. *Delhi News*, 20 Aug., *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 1, p. 408. The corrected statement of Rajab Ali, dated 14 Aug., gave the rebel numbers at that time as 12,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry, with 3,000 infantry and 100 cavalry who were 'undisciplined levies, of no account whatever'; *FSUP* i. 1010. K. Young to Col. H. B. Henderson, 13 Sept. 1857; Young, *Delhi*, p. 281. Young's figure for British effectives was limited to actual fighting men which he gave as 'eight thousand men of all arms, European and Native, fit for duty—half nearly European'. The official British figures for the effective strength of troops at Delhi on 11 Sept. were 7,794; Forrest, *State Papers*, i. 91 n. For Norman's figures see above, p. .

[108] These figures are calculated from Lt. Norman's narrative which does not give the numbers of the Kashmir (Jammu) contingent, and from Reid's for the 4th column which does; Forrest, *State Papers*, i. 470–2, and Reid, *Extracts from Letters*, p. 55.

As the assault columns sprang forward and went over the glacis in the clear morning light on 14 September, they met a hail of musketry, but their real difficulties did not begin until they were inside the city walls.

Without waiting for the charge of the British bayonets, the greater part of the rebels deserted the walls and bastions and ran pell-mell into the city, followed by our men. Some few stood manfully and endeavoured to check the flight of the rest; but they were soon shot and bayoneted, and the two columns halted inside the walls.[109]

The British had assumed that once over the walls of the city, Delhi would be theirs and that 'the first regiment which enters the town will be the signal for a general rout'.[110] Baird Smith's plan of attack had provided for the occupation of the entire city wall round to the Delhi Gate on the south and the seizure of key points inside the city within the space of a single day. But the British were rudely undeceived. As they tried to move along the narrow lanes, they were shot down from houses and roof-tops and suffered great loss. By noon on 14 September the attack had ground to a halt.

Every column had failed to accomplish all that was intended, and instead of having possession of the Juma Masjid, the Kotwali, the Fatehpur Mosque, and a great part of the Chandni Chauk, together with the Lahore Gate and Kishenganj, as had been hoped, we had only the bare city wall from the Kabul Gate to the college, with a few houses in advance near the church.[111]

The third column guided by Sir Theophilus Metcalfe did, indeed, penetrate as far as the Jami Masjid, but there encountered such fierce opposition from the *jihadis* who sallied out that it was thought prudent to retire.[112] Nicholson, obliged to urge on the laggard European infantry, was fatally wounded in a lane within the city wall leading to the Lahore Gate.

[109] Griffiths, *Siege of Delhi*, p. 157.

[110] Offg. Secy. Chief Commissioner of the Punjab to Govt. of India, 7 Sept. 1857; PP 1857–8, xliv, pt. 1, p. 309.

[111] Sir W. Lee-Warner, *Memoirs of Field Marshal Sir Henry Wylie Norman* (London, 1908), p. 156. Cf. Young, *Delhi*, p. 285: '... we didn't get possession of the whole of the city yesterday, as it was expected and intended we should have done'. Cf. Kaye, *Sepoy War*, iii. 590.

[112] For the oral tradition of the fight at the Jami Masjid, Ahmed Ali, *Twilight in Delhi* (London, 1966), pp. 151–2. Also see Mubarak Shah's account, Edwardes, *Red Year*, pp. 231–2.

Outside the city walls in Kishanganj the repulse of Reid's 4th column was much more severe. So far from advancing to the Lahore Gate as was planned, the column was flung back in confusion, and the British were obliged to retire on Hindu Rao's to rally their disorganized troops. At Kishanganj, they had encountered the strongest units among the rebel army, including the more or less intact Bareilly brigade. The rebels fought in a manner that extorted the admiration of Neville Chamberlain and Henry Daly watching the action from the Ridge.[113] Mubarak Shah's otherwise hazy account of the struggle says that the sepoys were stiffened by 'a mass of ghazis from the Bareilly and Nimach camps [who] hastened to taliwars [swords] and hurled themselves upon the British'.[114] The rebel counter-attack pressed the British hard; and though they managed to stem it by their light artillery protected only by cavalry, their losses were severe.[115]

Within the space of a few hours the assault on the city had cost the British force over 1,100 men and 60 officers in casualties, and the Achilles heel of the European infantryman had been dangerously exposed. It had become painfully obvious that he was no longer prepared to follow his officers against a foe who remained largely invisible in the bitter street-fighting. Hodson was amazed at the utter demoralization of the European troops through hard work and drink. 'For the first time in my life I have lived to see English soldiers refuse repeatedly to follow their officers.'[116] The British were now dangerously unbalanced. With their base camp denuded and their assault force clinging to an uncertain foothold within the city walls, the frightening sponge-like capacity of the city to absorb troops in house-to-house fighting stared them in the face. To an ailing and elderly commander like Archdale Wilson, the prospect was unnerving, and he questioned the wisdom of going on. On any normal reckoning his fears were well grounded. Had

[113] Cf. Kaye, *Sepoy War*, iii. 610. Positive identification of the position of rebel units on 14 Sept. is difficult. On the general dispositions of the 'City Brigade' on 10 Sept., *Delhi News*, *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 2, pp. 52–3. On 9 Sept. the Bareilly troops were among those holding Kishanganj, although relief had been requested in order to free them from offensive operations, *Press List*, p. 31, item 57/446, and p. 190, item 100/134. Other units at Kishanganj included the 29th NI and the Sikh Regiment.

[114] Cited Edwardes, *Red Year*, p. 230.

[115] Hope Grant, *Incidents in the Sepoy War*, pp. 122 ff.

[116] Hodson, *Twelve Years*, p. 296.

the rebels simply hung on to what they held, the British must have failed.

Yet although the rebels were now fighting under conditions in which they might at least have turned the tables, the long months of unsuccess, culminating in their failure to hold the British on the city wall, fatally impaired their morale. The nerve of the City brigade, the heterogeneous collection of fragmentary units too broken to possess any effective corps or regimental spirit, was the first to go. Only the men of the Nasirabad brigade within the city fought with any spirit, according to Mubarak Shah, and these continued to hold the Magazine. By noon on the day of the assault, when the British had pulled back into the area of the Kashmiri Gate and St James' Church, the bulk of the rebel troops had evacuated the city and repaired to their camp outside along the southern face. By the afternoon Young was reporting that 'the wretches have run away in great numbers';[117] and the next day, the British learned that many of the mutineers had left during the night, principally cavalry making for Rewari. Rajab Ali confirmed that few mutineers remained within the walled city.[118] The failure of the sepoys to reoccupy the city and counter-attack on the 15th when the European troops had gone to pieces with drink and plundering was fatal. On the morning of the 16th the rebels holding the vital Kishanganj position outside, doubtless fearful of the British moving through the now thinly held city and taking their camp in the rear, pulled out. Spies reported all regimental organization at an end, and Hodson from the Idgah height observed the rebels blowing up their ammunition in the Bareilly camp in clear preparation for flight. On the same morning within the city the British wrested the Magazine from the Nasirabad men. Yet the measure of British weakness was the time it took them to complete their task, even though from the 16th there remained no solid opposition. As late as 18 September, the difficulties appeared immense to the overwrought British commander:

> We are still in the same position in which we were yesterday. An attempt was made this morning to take the Lahore Gate, but failed from the refusal of the European soldiers to follow their officers. With one rush it would

[117] Young, *Delhi*, pp. 282, 286. Cf. Col. Becher to Capt. Nixon, 14 Sept., 1 p.m. reporting that large bodies of the enemy had been seen retreating in the direction of the Qutb and over the bridge (of boats); Muir, *Intelligence Records*, i. 519.

[118] *Delhi News*, 15 Sept., *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 2, p. 48.

have been done easily, but they would not make it. The fact is our men have a great dislike of street fighting. They do not see their enemy, who are on the tops of houses and under cover, and get a panic and will not advance. This is very sad and to me disheartening. We can I think hold our present position but I cannot see my way at all. I have now only 3,100 men (Infantry) in the City with no chance or possibility of any reinforcement, which if I were to attempt to push on into the City would be lost in such innumerable streets, or masses of houses, and would be annihilated and driven back . . .[119]

In the end the British gained a victory by default. The rebels declined to wage a battle to the death out of which they might still have snatched a desperate triumph. Only a small portion of the city had to be won by street-fighting, which the British now conducted cautiously, making the fullest use of artillery and systematically occupying houses by moving transversely across streets rather than progressing along them. The column commanders were instructed that they were 'not sent out for the purpose of direct fighting, but are carefully to avoid it'.[120] For the rest, the British had merely to take over the remainder of the city when finally deserted by the sepoys on 20 September.[121] There could be no better testimony to the nature of the contest. The outcome was determined by the simple persistence of organization on the part of the British and its collapse on the part of the rebels. For fighting morale was nine-tenths organization and only one part courage. As such they were embodied in the British officer corps. The sepoy regiments, once stripped of the officers, never successfully replaced them. The British officer corps, once stripped of its sepoy regiments, replaced them with a new native army which provided two-thirds of the assaulting force. Even when the British general and the British infantryman had been driven to the end of their tether, the officer corps held firm. By the sheer persistence of the organization and resolve it embodied, by merely nerving the troops to hold on to their positions through the period of crisis that followed the entry into the city on 14 September, it was able to outwear the rebels. Organization and its spirit, *esprit de corps*, enabled the white men to pay the necessary price in

[119] Maj.-Gen. Archdale Wilson to his wife, 18 Sept. 1857, Wilson Papers (xerox copy of transcripts made 'nearly sixty years later' by the Wilson family in the Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge, cited Kaye, *Sepoy War*, iii. 630. For the failure of British troops to follow their officers, Kaye, *Sepoy War*, iii. 597–8, 628–9.

[120] Young, *Delhi*, p. 287. Lee-Warner, *Memoirs of Sir Henry Norman*, p. 161.

[121] C. B. Saunders in Muir, *Intelligence Records*, ii. 187.

blood. Of the 1,630 men of the six British regiments in the assaulting columns, a third were killed and wounded, while among the officers the proportion rose to a half.[122] There was no one to account for the rebel dead. When the British raised their conquering flag over the old Mughal palace of the Red Fort on 21 September, they were a broken and shattered force. Three days later they could muster a pursuing column of only 2,600 men, less than half of which were European.

As Bakht Khan began withdrawing his forces from Delhi he is said to have urged the King to accompany him and continue the fight, but Bahadur Shah and his advisers saw that this would strip him of the excuse of having acted under constant duress from the mutineers.[123] He was, in any event, too far gone in years to assume the role of a fugitive King, and when Hodson guaranteed his life he readily surrendered. So ended the sepoy mutiny.

[122] Lee-Warner, *Memoirs of Sir Henry Norman*, p. 160. Lord Roberts calculated infantry losses throughout the siege as 37.9%, but officer casualties have not been separately assessed; Forrest, *State Papers*, i. 91.

[123] Mubarak Shah, cited Edwardes, *Red Year*, p. 234.

3

THE PEASANT WORLD AND BRITISH ADMINISTRATION

THE peasant world from which the sepoy came and to which he remained intimately bound exhibited a remarkable outward uniformity. The dead level of the upper Gangetic plain sweeps across northern India from Delhi to Patna. In the cool winter season, when only the smaller of the two annual sowings are in the ground, the first impression of the modern airborne traveller accustomed to the greenness of Europe is of the aridity of the land. Flying down the Doab from Delhi in January in the early dawn light, he seems to be passing over an immense sheet of sand through which sprawling rivers have cut their paths like rivulets on a beach after the tide has receded. As the sun mounts and the features of the landscape become clearer, this impression is corrected by the signs of human habitation. Everywhere villages dot the plain, never more than a mile or two apart and each set in the midst of its own coloured counterpane of sugar-cane, winter wheat, barley, and the yellow mustard flower; their nondescript mud-walled or unfired brick dwellings clustering under the shade of mango, nim, pipal, and the occasional palm tree. Wherever water can be conveyed from wells or irrigation channels, the parched, eviscerated earth bursts into green revolution. Yet all this does little to relieve the sense of uniformity. At the edges of the region, south-west of the Jumna between Delhi and Agra, the low, barren hills of the Aravallis and more dimly the fantastic ravines of the Chambal 'badlands' serve to emphasize by contrast the unity and uniformity of the plain. Over on the other side of the Doab and crossing the Ganges into Oudh there is little change until the far Himalayan hill-country is reached. Patches of waste blanched by the saline efflorescence known as *reh* become more noticeable, as do the lakes, woodlands, and groves that at one time gave Oudh the name of 'the garden of India'. On the ground, the casual motor traveller can easily be dulled by the constant reiteration of the scenery, but the attentive observer will note the regional variations as he travels south-east-

wards, if only the absence of the Persian wheel in the traditional irrigation wells of the eastern districts and their different types of lifting gear. House styles also display some alteration, the flat roof prevailing in the western region about Delhi, for here 'the sun is more to be feared than the rain', while in the east the gabled tiled or thatched sloping roof are conspicuous to deal with a more humid climate.

Lurking beneath these superficialities are more important regional distinctions. The eastern districts—Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Benares, Ghazipur, and Ballia—are on balance rice-growing and carry a heavier population, a distinction even more marked in the first half of the nineteenth century.[1] Their security against serious famine served to promote dense settlement, which was already a prominent feature when the British gradually took over the administration of the Benares province after 1781. Pressure on the soil forged the economic bonds of dependence, and reinforced social differentiation. It is no accident that caste distinctions obtrude sharpest in the eastern districts. Yet throughout the greater part of the Gangetic plain a numerous population ensured close cultivation and permitted the exaction of a quasi-rental tribute in labour, kind, and cash, which gave proprietary dominion its effective meaning. The patterns of lordship and dependence in agrarian relations harked back in some cases to the first clearing of the soil and the founding of the village settlements, but in general the dominant landholders owed their position to earlier conquest and the subjugation or extirpation of the existing inhabitants, whether the aboriginal Cherus, Pasis, and Bhars, or the later Meos. Foremost among these landholders were the warrior clan groups, loosely termed Rajput or Chattri, who appear to have established their control in a complex series of migrations between the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries. They made their chief settlement close to the great rivers Ganga, Jumna and their main tributaries, the Ram Ganga, the Kali Nadi, the Sengar, the Gumti (Tomathi), and the Sai, but they also fanned out into the intervening countryside.

[1] A return of population in 1853 gave density per square mile of total area as:

Hissar	100	Aligarh	527	Allahabad	495
Rohtak	281	Muttra	535	Azamgarh	657
Saharanpur	371	Agra	536	Jaunpur	737
Meerut	515	Kanpur	500	Benares	856
				Ghazipur	752

(*NWP Census*, 1853, G. Christian.)

Their history has been so confounded with theories of Aryan settlement and so tangled with vague sentiment on the subject of the Indian village community that it is difficult to appreciate the paucity of their numbers, or the fact that in the population at large they remained a small minority. When the British began to make the first regular decennial censuses from 1872, they found Rajputs rarely to number 7 or 8 per cent of any one district containing usually from three-quarters of a million to a million souls.

Rajput settlement had run wide rather than deep, the result of a constant striving to sustain the life-style of a *thakur* or petty lord of the soil. Yet over the course of centuries Rajput communities had undergone considerable internal stratification, so that while at one end of the scale they numbered powerful and wealthy local rajas, at the other they were to be found as mere cultivators. While some measure of social and economic differentiation among them was present almost everywhere, it was given greater emphasis by differences of clan and locality. The 'superior' Rajput clans and subclans had often succeeded in maintaining a higher economic status, while others intermingled with them had to content themselves in the ranks of subordinate cultivators. Again, in one locality Rajputs might be few and occupy purely 'landlord' roles, while in another they formed 'swollen' proprietary communities forced nearer the soil by the constant partition of land rights. These latter communities are of crucial importance since it was among them that the Bengal Army found the bulk of its Rajput recruits. Indeed the army was drawn from communities, whether Rajput or Brahmin, who formed a precariously poised élite, unable to subsist any longer by purely rental tribute but fighting to stave off the necessity of cultivating the soil with their own hands.

The most prestigious Rajput clans were the most numerous, particularly the Bhadauria, the Chauhan, and the Bais, who held consolidated blocks in their 'home areas' as well as numerous offshoots elsewhere. Baiswara, or the home land of the Bais, straddled the boundary of what later became the Unao, Rai Bareli, and Lucknow districts of Oudh. In the exaggerated language of the Chief Commissioner in 1858, it constituted 'the Nursery of the Sepoy Army, 40,000 men being sent from that country alone to fill the ranks of our old army'.[2] Probably this figure was nearer to the total

[2] *FSUP* ii. 464. Cf. Sleeman's estimate that in 1852 at the time of his tour there were 16,000 in the British army and civil service from Baiswara; cited *Rai Bareli SR 1872*, Appendix K, p. 74.

Bais population of the area, but their settlements elsewhere were comparatively substantial. There appear to have been over 30,000 in Azamagarh, some 25,000 in Jaunpur, 17,000 in Allahabad, 18,000 in Banda, with smaller but still significant settlements of nearly 7,000 in Kanpur and 9,000 in Farukhabad.[3] The Chauhans in the contiguous districts of Mainpuri, Eta, Etawah, and Agra numbered at the 1872 census, 66,467 in a region containing a Rajput population of 282,604 and an overall population of 3,232,197.[4] The Bhadaurias in the Chambal ravine country of Agra and Etawah were no more than 10,000 or so, but their settlement traversed the river into Gwalior state; their total numbers were estimated in 1840 as 25,000.[5] Clan settlements of this size were exceptional; most of them in any one district comprised only a few thousand. Yet even in the larger clans it would be wrong to suppose that they enjoyed a unified organization or an exclusive quasi-tribal possession. Despite the use of the common clan name, they were much subdivided. The Bhadaurias were split into half a dozen lines, the Bhadauria raja exercising a merely titular supremacy from his fort at Naugaon in the Panahat pargana of Agra district. The Chauhans had separated under the separate houses of Eta, Mainpuri, Partabner, and Chakarnagar. The Bais who traced their descent from the celebrated Tilok Chand were split into the two great houses of Dundia Khera and Moramau, as well as the minor lines of Sainbassi and Naistha. Even in these home areas, they had allowed Brahmins and Kayasths to settle and control land and were 'credited with having introduced forty three other clans of Chattris'. Being 'the strongest clan in Oudh . . . they have been able to hold their own, and the numerous communities of Chauhans, Rathores, Biseyns, Ghurwars, Raghbansis, etc., who are settled among them, have got there by marriage and peaceable settlement on waste lands, and not by force at all'.[6]

[3] The Bais population of Rai Bareli according to the crude Oudh Census of 1865 was 25,284, cited *Rai Bareli SR 1872*, Statements, p. xiii. See also E. T. Atkinson, *Statistical Accounts of the North-Western Provinces* (Allahabad 1874–84), hereafter Atkinson, *Gaz.*

[4] *Census of the NW Provinces, 1872*, vol. i, *General Report*, Supplementary Table VB.

[5] *Idem*. On total Bhadauria numbers in 1840, Atkinson, *Gaz.* vii. 482.

[6] *Rai Bareli SR 1872*, p. 8, and App. K, p. 11. On Bais, also see H. M. Elliot, *Memoirs of the History, Folk Lore and Distribution of the Races of the N.W. Provinces of India* (London, 1869), i. 13.

If even in the home tracts of large dominant clans the settlement pattern was that of a patchwork quilt, the effect was still more involved where no single clan was pre-eminent. To the north-west of Baiswara extended a large area which later became the Unao and Hardoi districts. In Unao the country had come to be divided up among as many as sixteen Rajput clans, each holding a distinct tract of country but none establishing a general dominance. To the earliest settlements of Rawat and Mahror had succeeded the Bisen, Guhurwar, and Chandels. In the main post-twelfth-century migrations, the Gautam, Janwar, Chauhan, Dikshit, and Sukurwar had followed. Finally from the sixteenth century onwards, small groups of Gahlots, Sengars, Ponwars, Gaurs, and Parihars had settled as a result of grants awarded by the Mughal regime.[7] Neighbouring Hardoi, reputedly the poorest and most turbulent of the Oudh districts, exhibited a similar pattern: 'No other district in Oudh can present such a distribution of property—twenty-four clans instead of the five or six which are found in Rae Bareli or Partabgarh.'

Constant internal fission and migration had resulted in this remarkable scatter of lineage groups. In the Jalalabad pargana of the next district, Shahjahanpur (part of Rohilkhand), there were no less than fifty-four distinct Rajput clans, fifteen having more than a thousand members each.

> Most of the largest of these clans have large tracts of country of their own, in which they originally settled, and have lived and multiplied, and in which they are the prevailing clan of Thakoors. Much the same as in the Highlands of Scotland, there are the Morrae country and Mackinnon country, and in certain parts every second or third individual is a Munro, a Fraser, a Macintosh etc. [But it was noticeable that the largest clans, the Chauhans and Gaurs, had] no distinct tract of special country of their own, but are scattered about through the country of the other clans amongst whom they have settled, chiefly in consequence of marriage alliances.[8]

Once separation had occurred, there was often little to connect these bearing the same clan name. Doubtless for reasons of prestige, men clung longest to such names as Chauhan, but this did nothing to ensure wider collaboration or even recognition. As with all emigrant peoples the farther they removed from the parent stock, the lower their own social ranking and yet the more lordly their posture towards the subjugated population. Hence the farther Rajput

[7] C. A. Elliott, *Chronicles of Oonao* (Allahabad, 1862).
[8] *Shahjahanpur SR 1874*, pp. xxiv–xxv.

settlement had proceeded in a northerly and easterly direction in the plain region, the more dubious their clan standing and the more anxious they became to marry their daughters nearer to the parent stock. Beyond the Ganges the frontier mentality bred a laxity in marriage arrangements that cast doubt on the purity of the dominant lineages. As Maconachie noted in 1867 in the Unao district of Oudh:

> Among all clans, concubinage is common, and especially among the Rajpoots, who prefer this connection to a regular marriage: its consequence is that a great proportion of the Rajpoots are really illegitimate, but it is hardly looked upon as a reproach, and hitherto, as often as not, the children were allowed to inherit. It is this however which has caused the Oudh Rajpoots to bear so bad a name among the Trans Ganges clans.

Much later James (Lord) Meston, the settlement officer of Budaun, was to observe how in 'the once powerful Janghara clan' it was 'yearly becoming more difficult to find a family of pure descent: nathnis, mehteranis [courtesans], and dancing girls are kept in the zenana [female quarters] in disregard alike of ordinary decency and public sentiment; and the race is perceptibly declining in physique and manliness'.[9] The numerous so-called Chauhans of the upper Doab districts of Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur, and the neighbouring Rohilkhand districts of Moradabad and Bijnaur, had long ago lost all recognition as Rajputs, despite the continued use of the clan name.[10] In certain areas there were possibly economic pressures at work. Wherever population had been or remained scanty, there was an incentive to breed fast and incorporate the progeny within the clan. Hence the dry areas periodically decimated by famine, where the most prestigious clans like the Bhadaurias dwelt, also saw a multitude of 'bastard' Rajput groups. In Mathura, Whiteway —the settlement officer in the 1870s—alleged that more than half the Rajput clans were 'impure'. On the desert fringes of Haryana and the Punjab, it was difficult to find a pure clan. Many had taken to Islam, others practised *karewa* or widow remarriage, and the great farmer caste of Jats all claimed Rajput origins to an extent that Ibbetson found it impossible to draw a line between the two. Among the Bais in Baiswara the supposedly 'pure blooded' used

[9] J. S. Meston, 6 Jan. 1896, *Selections of Papers on Agricultural Indebtedness*, iii (Simla, 1898), p. 49.

[10] H. M. Elliot, *Memoirs*, i. 67, 171. Also W. Crooke, *Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh* (Calcutta, 1896), ii. 210.

the ancestral prefix of Tilokchand to distinguish themselves 'from the Kutbai, who are supposed to be the offspring of the real Bais by women of inferior caste. The Tilokchandi Bais will neither eat nor inter-marry with them.'[11]

All these circumstances made it difficult for the clan to constitute a sufficiently extensive or cohesive unit to form the basis of local political organization. In any event it was largely at the mercy of the superior state power. While in certain regions lineage and sub-lineage heads may have been elevated by military needs to a position of authority over their clansmen, the formal title of raja and, above all, the right to collect revenue could not be adopted without the active or tacit consent of the superior imperial power. Both the Bhadauria and the Bais rajas were practically the creations of the Mughals or their predecessors.[12] Such a vassal status meant inevitably that none would be allowed to become too powerful and those like the Gautam raja of Argal in the Fatehpur district who challenged their authority could be totally crushed and their clan largely dispossessed. In the prolonged crash of the Mughal empire in the eighteenth century, the Rajputs came off badly. The Bhadauria raj was absorbed by the Jats and when revived by the Marathas was but a faint shadow of its former self; the Mainpuri Chauhans were brought under the heel of the self-made Farukhabad revenue farmer, Udaichand, who took the title of Chaudhuri of Bishengarh. The Etawah rajas wilted under the revenue exactions of Almas Ali Khan, representing the Oudh ruler, and appear to have surrendered substantial portions of their domains north of the Jumna to their Brahmin officials.[13] In Kanpur the Chandel raj of Shiurajpur and its cadet houses were similarly depressed. In Rohilkand at the other end of the region, Balwant Singh, the self-made Benares raja, built up his domain by shattering the power of the surrounding Rajput clan groups. Only in eastern and south-eastern Oudh did they escape relatively unscathed and the dominant Rajput clan under its lineage heads remain to constitute the local political unit. Here in Sultanpur and part of Faizabad and Partabgarh, the Bachgota rajas held sway with Bisen and Sombansi in Partabgarh and the Bais chiefs behind them. But such a situation remained exceptional,

[11] *Rai Bareli SR 1872*, App. K, p. 8.

[12] On the Bhaudaurias, Atkinson, *Gaz.* vii. 474 ff. H. M. Elliot, *Memoirs*, i. 25 ff.

[13] *Etawah SR 1875.*

to be found only in the remoter regions of hill and jungle where population was light and fiscal resources few. An imperial power holding the Gangetic plain could not normally permit anything in the nature of true clan states. Elsewhere the state had pounded society into much smaller fragments. In many even the fragmentation of clan settlement in the Doab ruled out any such possibility even as an administrative expedient. Only at the very lowest sub-district level of the pargana did the lineage system of dominant clans retain effective meaning and use. And this had relation primarily to land control rather than to any residual clan government. Even in regard to land control, the Rajputs while retaining the lion's share of land rights had been forced to concede a great deal to other groups, notably to Brahmins, to Muslim grantees, and Kayasth officials, who had sometimes multiplied more rapidly than themselves. In the west, Rajput dominance had widely given way to the inroads of the Jat farmer castes and cattle-keeping Gujars in a myriad of local conflicts.

Hence the situation which confronted the British when they annexed the Doab to their dominions between 1801 and 1803 was one in which below the remnants of Mughal district administration and the detritus of fiscal lordships and revenue farms, they encountered groups of villages held together in kinship affiliation among the dominant landholding castes, the land revenue being collected through the agency of the different levels of intermediaries who sometimes possessed and often did not possess any clan connection with the villages. Villages were often combined by political affiliations in multiples of four or seven, the largest being a *chaurasi* of eighty-four villages.[14] These perhaps reflected the original pattern of clan settlement or the nominal extent of the tract granted to an individual clan chief. The village or *mauza* was a defined area of land which might include one or more subordinate hamlets. Usually it coincided with the *mahal* or revenue-paying unit, but where a tract had been gradually colonized from a parent village and rights had devolved as shares in each, the *mahal* could comprise portions of separate villages. Such 'complex *mahals*' tended to indicate tight and dense clan settlement. They were to be found in Ballia, Benares,

[14] Cf. Elliot, *Memoirs*; B. H. Baden-Powell, *The Indian Village Community* (London, 1896). A *chaurasi* rarely contained the exact number of 84 villages, either because this was a notional figure or various villages had been abandoned or additional ones founded.

in Azamgarh, in Hardoi, in Farukhabad, among the Rajput communities, or in the Noh *tansil* of Mathura among the Jats.[15]

Groups of kin-linked villages of this kind were usually found to pay their land revenue through an intermediary, either a temporary one, like a revenue farmer (*mustajir*, *ijaradar*), or a more permanent one termed a *taluqdar*. In some cases the members of the dominant landholding caste in a village comprised a single family who lived in a fortified dwelling and took no part in cultivation; in others the dominant landholders were numerous and themselves engaged in agriculture. This graded hierarchy of rights in the land appears so complex as to evade precise definition, and baffled early British administrators accustomed to modern western notions of individual freehold title.

In what did these land control rights traditionally consist? Whether or not the high theory of the Mughal revenue system arrogated to the state the pre-eminent ownership of the soil, there were practical reasons for holding that the traditional weight of the impost on the land was sufficient to prevent private rent property from emerging. In 1832 the settlement officer of Bareilly district in Rohilkhand was commenting that it was 'a mere farce to talk, up here at least, of proprietors in any other sense than that of Government officers for the collection of the revenue with a small remuneration for the trouble of collection'.[16] Even in 1872, Auckland Colvin could claim that it was misleading to talk of private rent. There was no evidence that anything in the nature of genuine competition rents existed among subordinate 'tenant' cultivators. All such payments had their origin in the state land revenue demand, and had remained inelastic despite the rise in the price level of agricultural produce. Rents had at last moved upwards only when the British themselves had begun to raise them by judicial process in order to levy a higher revenue demand on those they had recognized as 'landlords'.[17] If proprietary right existed at all, it appeared to consist merely of the semi-hereditary and partially alienable right to

[15] On complex mahals, cf. the Sombansis of Bamiari who comprised some 500 members divided into six *tarafs* or families who held shares in 18 villages. *Farrukhabad SR 1875*, New rate reports, pp. 158–9.

[16] S. Boulderson, cited *Bareilly SR 1874*, p. 126.

[17] Auckland Colvin, *Memorandum on the Revision of Land Revenue Settlements in the North-Western Provinces, 1860–72* (Allahabad, 1872). On the derivation of rent rates from revenue rates, see also D. T. Roberts, *Report on the Revision of Records of . . . the Ballia District 1882–5* (Allahabad, 1886), p. 15.

engage for the land revenue demand and enjoy a national percentage of 10 per cent on the engagement, or compensation in lieu if a revenue farmer were temporarily engaged instead. Yet modern Indian historians have produced a wealth of documentation to disprove the widespread belief of Marx and others that private property in the soil was generally absent. Numerous deeds of private sale, mortgage, and bequest appear to demonstrate that a private transferable title was enjoyed by a class of local *zamindars* who for the most part exercised authority over one or more villages from a fortified dwelling or who might simply be village notables with a share in the lands of a village.[18]

Much of the controversy arose from the confusion of two distinct forms of proprietary right. Firstly, there was the right to engage for the land revenue (*malguzari*), and secondly, the physical or proprietary dominion over the soil itself (*malkiyat-i-zamin*), including the right to locate cultivators, plant groves, dig wells, and control the waste.[19] The revenue engagement right was exercised at many different levels, from a large *taluqdar* engaging for hundreds of villages to a small village *zamindar*. It was not an exclusive right but co-existed with the right of under-engagement down to the smallest unit of revenue accounting (the *mahal*) which was usually coincident with the village (*mauza*). Here at last the primary level of revenue engagement was performed by those who exercised proprietary dominion over the soil itself (the *maliks*), even though they might be so numerous as to have to pay through representatives or managers (*muqaddams*). Even so, at this lowest level the revenue engaging right remained perfectly distinct from proprietary dominion.

The revenue engaging right, springing from imperial grant or continued imperial recognition, was by nature insecure particularly at the higher levels. Under gross over-assessment—as in Rohilkhand—it could become more of a burden than a source of profit. Hence all intermediaries whether lineage heads, revenue grantees, or *taluqdars* usually sought to strengthen their position by combining

[18] Cf. Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* (Delhi, 1963). Also articles by N. A. Siddiqi, Nurul Hasan, and B. R. Grover in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, i (1963–4), pp. 1–23, 73–83, 107–19; ii (1965), pp. 166–77, 259–88, 373–80.

[19] The distinction has best been drawn by Grover: *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, ii (1965), pp. 261–2, 268.

the revenue collecting right over an area with direct proprietary dominion in a number of constituent villages. Many of these magnates had risen from the position of petty *zamindar* in one or more villages where they already enjoyed the *malik*'s right. As *taluqdar*, they would be allowed additionally to hold a number of other villages revenue-free as a reward for their services (*nankar*). These were obvious places to attempt to gain additional rights as *malik*.[20] The process by which an Indian raj or petty state was constructed mirrored this process on an extended scale. To obtain proprietary dominion meant the peaceable or violent displacement of the existing village *maliks* by the dependants or relatives of the rising magnates.

Jonathan Duncan in 1790 reckoned that of 5,000 village *zamindars* in the Benares province, 2,000 had been ejected by successive rajas of Benares. The Bara raj (of Allahabad district) was carved out of Rewa state in a similarly drastic fashion. According to Sir Richard Temple, the Lal family began to acquire control of a number of villages in the eighteenth century by standing as security for the revenue or advancing loans for its payment. When they had gained a sufficiently strong footing they resorted to open force until 'having universally reduced the resident [*thakur*] proprietors, the Lals succeeded in expelling them altogether, and introducing their own dependants'. Fittingly on British annexation the Benares raja got the Bara raj into its financial clutches and was only persuaded to disgorge it in 1831. The rise of the Mursan raj in the Aligarh district illustrates the same process within the context of a relatively homogeneous petty clan state. According to John Thornton's enquiries in 1834, the head of the Tenwa Jats first gained a measure of supremacy within his lineage territory of Tappa Jewar and then acquired revenue farming rights in the surrounding region. Ultimately the raja managed to displace all trace of the proprietary co-sharers (*biswadars*) in one third of the villages of the Mursan pargana, and Thornton felt bound to recognize these as belonging to the raja in full proprietary right. Much the same occurred in the Mainpuri raj, although the settlement officer's investigations were prejudged in large measure by the prevailing anti-*taluqdari* bias of revenue policy.[21] In the Unao district of Oudh, which did not come

[20] J. F. Macandrew, *Rai Bareli SR 1872*, (App. K, p. 22.

[21] Cf. J. Thornton, 'Report on Mursan', in *Reports on the Revenue Settlement of the N.W. Provinces of the Bengal Presidency under Regulation IX, 1833* (Benares,

under British administration until 1856, a *taluqdar* could build up a local power basis by violent appropriation much later in the day. Here, across the river from Kanpur, Jussa Singh of Bangermau inaugurated a reign of terror: 'dividing the pargana between himself and his cousin . . . he set to work to stamp out every vestige of a former right. The villagers he turned out received the choice of service or death if he caught them. The majority fled and not until annexation did they venture to return to their homes.'

Dispossession at the village level was clearly no innovation of British rule. Physical eviction remained doubtless comparatively rare, but everything depended on the numbers and depth of the old proprietary community. Where they were few and non-cultivating, they could be readily ousted. When the British took over at the beginning of the nineteenth century and introduced the legal concept of proprietary title inherent in the Bengal Regulations, they gave a sharp spur to this process. For what was defined as *zamindari* or full proprietary title to land title now glued almost indissolubly together the revenue engagement right with proprietary dominion of the soil. Thus, for so long as titles remained in doubt and the State was not bound by earlier judicial or administrative decisions, that was taken by revenue officials as the ultimate test of right.[22]

It was not always possible to procure the immediate eviction of the old proprietary body, but the managerial rights could first be transferred. In the village of 'Ummurpore' in the Meerut district the Gujar chief, Nain Singh, put in a Gujar cultivator as village manager (*muqaddam*) over the heads of the old Tyagi proprietors, and gave him 'the general management of the village, with authority to allot lands for cultivation, and to settle *ryots*'. Nearby, exploiting

1862; hereafter *Reps. Rev. Settl. NWP*), i. 248 ff., and N. B. Edmonstone, 'Report on Mainpuri', ibid. Also E. Stokes, 'Traditional Elites in the Great Rebellion of 1857: Some Aspects of Rural Revolt in the upper and central Doab', in E. R. Leach and S. N. Mukherjee (eds.), *Elites in South Asia* (Cambridge, 1970). (Also in E. T. Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj*, Cambridge, 1978, ch. 8, pp. 185–204.) R. G. Fox, *Kin, Clan, Raja and Rule* (Berkeley, 1971), pp. 71, 96. In Somna, the Jadon Rajput, Thakur Jai Ram Singh, obtained the grant of a *taluqa* from Perron and left the Chauhan Rajput village *maliks* in possession under a sub-lease, but when he died in 1825 his three sons resorted to open eviction: '. . . in a short time there was not a trace of an old zamindar in the taluka. The original proprietors were deprived of all their remaining privileges, and were not even allowed to reside within the limits of the estate' (*Aligarh SR 1882*, p. 23).

22 Where a proprietor defaulted or refused the assessment, the revenue engagement right could still be given temporarily to a revenue farmer.

a thin layer of settlement in the Puth and Sayana parganas near the Ganges, the ancestors of the Jat chief, Fateh Singh, had constructed the Kuchesar raj in the late eighteenth century out of revenue farming rights. His father, Ramdhan Singh, had extorted the *malik* rights in a number of villages by what Sir Henry Elliot dubbed 'the exercise of the most rigorous and cold-blooded barbarity'. When Ramdhan Singh died in 1815, a European official was sent to enquire and 'ordered all present to stand in two divisions, one representing the *muqaddam* and inferior tenants, the other the claimants of the proprietary right. Most from fear of Futteh Sing, or apprehension of causing an increase of *juma* [the revenue demand] by disputed title, and others, through total ignorance of the consequences which would ensue by not having their names enrolled, stood on the side of the *muqaddam*, and offered no opposition to Futteh Sing's admission. The consequence was that he got recorded as zamindar in almost every instance, and remains as such in all those villages from which he has not been ousted by the Special Commission.'

The intensification of expropriation is to be seen vividly in the small pargana of Sukrawah which was granted in *jagir* (cash revenue grant) to Amin-ud-daulah by the nawab of Farukhabad well before British rule. From 1789 Amin-ud-daulah made every effort to reduce the rights of the landholders. Playing off the Brahmin *chaudhuri* family and the Ahirs against the four different Rajput sub-castes who each held a few villages apiece, he finally managed to triumph over all, turning the engine of the newly established British law courts to his ends. 'Under the demands for revenue he by the agency of the courts, caused the houses and orchards of them [the Ahirs] and the [Gaur] Thakoors of Dhoondownes to be sold and himself bought them.' Having expelled the Ahirs he destroyed their fort and pulled down the *thakurs'* houses.[23]

It is noticeable that this type of total displacement was effected in the southern part of what became Farukhabad district in the region to the south of the Kali Nadi, whereas to the north nearer the centre of power of the Bangash nawabs of Farukhabad, Rajput settlement had been much less disturbed. In the south, Rajput clan areas had been much more expansive and in consequence much less dense. In

[23] *Selections from the Records of Government, N.W.P.* (hereafter *Sels Recs. Govt. NWP*), vol. i, pt. 4, No. xxii, 'Settlement of Pergunnah Sukrawah', pp. 245 ff. *Farrukhabad SR 1875*, Pargana Reports, p. 132.

the Tirwa pargana and neighbouring portions of what became the Kanpur and Etawah districts, the Gahlots had at one time held as many as 180 villages. But their numbers had been few and their dominion 'lordly'. It was said in Aurangzeb's time that 60 of the tribe held the 180 villages, giving three villages to each man. Under the rule of Oudh in the later eighteenth century, they had come under the control of a Rajput family of the Baghel clan who had succeeded in setting themselves up as *taluqdars* and acquiring the style and titles of rajas of Tirwa and Thatia. On the advent of British rule, the Thatia raja revolted and his *taluq* was broken up, but the Gahlot villages restored to full proprietary rights soon succumbed to revenue pressure and were sold away, leaving the Tirwa raja as *zamindar* in a large area. Although they preserved 16 of their 54 villages in the pargana, and held tenant rights in 32 others, total Gahlot numbers were so few that they are not even enumerated in the pargana statistic and must have been well under a hundred.[24]

The attention is naturally drawn to these crowded proprietary communities since they marked the critical point where the higher castes were being driven close to the soil as cultivators, and where the struggle for the retention of *thakur* status made a man cling to a fractionalized, uneconomic proprietary holding. The principal form of relief for such hard-pressed Rajput families was service, whether in government, police, the army, or private firms, both in British India and the native states. This at least provided a man with his maintenance, enabled him to send home a small but steady cash remittance, and in many cases ensured him a pension and credit with the moneylender. Long after the Bais Rajputs had lost their favoured position as recruits of the sepoy army, a net sum of nearly seven lakhs of rupees in money orders poured annually into the Unao district, nearly the whole being 'distributed by the post-offices in the Purwa *tahsil* where the Bais clan pre-dominates'.[25]

The effect of petty state-building in the eighteenth century under the aegis of the nawabs of Oudh and other regional rulers often fell particularly hard on old Rajput proprietors, on Brahmins and on some old Muslim settlements, but particularly on the Rajputs who had once had a dominating position over much of the north Indian

[24] Atkinson, *Gaz.* vii.
[25] W. H. Moreland, *Unao SR 1896*, p. 3.

plain. Rajput settlement varied greatly as a percentage of the population. In some parts of southern Awadh it reached as high as 15 per cent, elsewhere it fell to no more than 2 per cent. The tightly knit bodies of Rajput petty proprietors where their settlement was dense were particularly vulnerable to rapid proprietary mutation and pressures from the parcellization of the revenue paying structure above them. These groups might progressively lose their revenue engaging rights to revenue farmers and new men; they might be ousted from proprietary dominion when these elements began to press down into the villages. Certainly they could fall back on their own demesne land (*sir*) when other economic resources were exhausted and retained a role in the villages as 'privileged tenants'. But rapid population growth and the division of their hereditary holdings into smaller and smaller plots as the generations went by forced them to proliferate downwards, as it were, by becoming agriculturalists themselves. Even this agricultural role was inhibited by their strict caste rules against touching the plough and against manuring which tended to deny them the advantages of close, specialized agriculture reaped by the Jats or the Kurmis, for instance.

Although these swollen proprietary or quasi-proprietary communities remained exceptional rather than typical, they were doubly important. They provided not only the all-important link between the peasantry and the sepoy army, but they were also the natural sources of rural turbulence. They have been referred to largely in terms of Rajput groups, but Brahmin landholding castes and the descendants of old Muslim grantees were in an equivalent position. To plot their distribution is not readily accomplished. Not until the 1870s did the British settlement reports begin to record statistics of tenures with any show of precision, and by then the gap between legal and sociological fact was too wide to present anything but a much distorted picture. While it is true that old joint *pattidari* and *bhaiachara* proprietary communities which had survived until the 1860s were evidence of the immense resistance to tenurial change which the so-called developmental cycle incurred as it reached its bottom dead centre, it is also true that the artificial and arbitrary manner in which revenue officials recorded tenures in the early decades of British rule had submerged many of the coparcenary communities from sight. In many instances, particularly in the lower Doab and eastern districts, full *zamindari* (or sole proprie-

tary) title to coparcenary villages was accorded to men who were essentially revenue farmers or auction purchasers; other magnates, as we have seen, obtained it by forceful means. Immediately in official eyes, the old proprietary body was reduced to the status of tenants and vanished from official cognizance in the record of proprietary tenures. The element of artificiality increased with time. Despite official lamentations, the practice of the sale of whole coparcenary villages to single purchasers for revenue default continued as late as the 1850s. Voluntary partitions could also in a formal sense transform a village held as a single *pattidari mahal* into a number of separate *zamindari* estates. Hence the bare record that a certain proportion of a district was held in *zamindari* tenure, another portion, *pattidari*, and the remainder *bhaiachara* is of limited diagnostic value. This remains true even when it is possible to discover the height and width of the pyramid of revenue-payers and thus gauge the relative distribution of property into large and small 'estates'. For quite apart from the alterations in title and the numerous changes that had occurred in some seventy years of British administration, the settlement reports registered only revenue-payers as proprietors. In any event, despite the record of rights, the legal structure was by nature averse to the recognition of double tenures, and for formal purposes placed many sub-proprietary groups in the category of tenants. In Oudh, where annexation did not come about until 1856, this was still more true because of the post-Mutiny reaction in favour of the *taluqdars*. In Baiswara it is evident how important the village bodies remained. Although sub-settlements were only a handful and the village bodies simply groups of tenantry, they continued in practice to fill a landlord role: 'neither men nor women, rich or poor will put a hand to cultivation or labor [*sic*] of any sort'. No true Bais soiled his hands with cultivation. 'The zamindars of Rai Bareli are not cultivating communities. On the contrary, they are small communities living on rents . . .'[26] Of the 101 revenue villages in the pargana of Daundia Khere, 26 were held by four *taluqdars*. The remainder were held by 1,549 proprietors—only 16 sub-proprietors being recognized. This gave some 20 acres apiece to each proprietor, only half of which were cultivated.

[26] *Rai Bareli SR 1872*, App. K, p. 19.

EDITOR'S CONCLUDING NOTE

This chapter was both the most complex and the least finished of the extant sections of *The Peasant Armed*. Several different versions and numerous unfinished notes exist, though sadly, like the tenurial systems being described, it is impossible to establish any overall argument from these fragments. Evidently Eric Stokes intended the chapter to penetrate beneath the 'swollen proprietary bodies' of Rajputs to deal with the lower castes and agrarian labourers, but the form of his treatment of these can only be dimly anticipated from remarks in *The Peasant and the Raj* and the other chapters of this work. However, it was this upper level—the level of the high-caste petty proprietor—which he saw as the key to the nature of the 1857 Revolt. For not only did the heavily subdivided Rajput coparcenary villages provide bitter and prolonged opposition to British armies in the North Western Provinces and Oudh, but they also linked together other important actors in the revolt. First, as Stokes was beginning to elucidate in the last few pages, these embattled *rentiers* were dependent on service in the British Army to maintain their status. As British recruiting policy began to move against them after the Afghan campaign of 1842, they saw new men from outside the traditional recruiting areas and from lower castes taking the positions on which they had relied. But in addition to general resentment, there was also the fact that it was in the Rajput and Brahmin villages of Oudh and Benares that the mutinied sepoys sought support and succour in June and July 1857. Secondly, the Rajput and Brahmin *rentiers* provided a direct link to the peasant proper. Not only had many branches of the old proprietary communities been forced by subdivision and economic hardship to cultivate the land themselves (even if they did not touch the plough), but as honoured and high-caste men in the villages they could often act to bring into the revolt a much wider following among lower castes and village labourers. Stokes, of course, did not imply that a broadly based popular revolt going beyond the larger landholders or the high-caste petty proprietors was impossible, but he argued that without élite support such mass protest was likely to be inchoate and short-lived. After all the magnates and petty proprietors already had a near-monopoly of physical power in the villages and it was from their ranks that the military leaders of the revolt were generally drawn. To emphasize the importance of

these village notables should not be taken to imply that the rural Indian masses were acquiescing willingly in colonial rule or in the domination of landholders, merely that they could not possibly succeed in revolt without the wider organization and skills of the élites.

In the following chapter Eric Stokes goes on to broaden the analysis by reference to the role in revolt of three other major social groups. First, he deals with the response of what approximates most nearly to the 'rich peasants' of the later nineteenth century during this period: the Jat farmers of the Delhi territory and Haryana. Stokes has already dealt with these groups in chapter 7 of *The Peasant and the Raj*, but here his analysis is more complex. The Jat farmers differed from the 'old' village élites with whom he has been dealing in that they derived most of their income—and their social status—from direct cultivation rather than from petty proprietorship. In the areas of the west of the Gangetic valley where Jats and their allies were dominant, population remained relatively light and land plentiful in the mid-nineteenth century. Landlordism as it existed in the more popular areas of Benares and Oudh was much less significant here. The roots of revolt, according to Stokes, lay not so much in the frustrations of a degraded proprietary class trying to subsist on its subdivided holdings, but in the pockets of relative poverty caused by ecological differences and the action of severe British revenue assessments. These Jats may have been the rich farmers of the later nineteenth century in embryo, but revenue rates were excessively high in the 1850s and those living on poor, unirrigated lands might be both impoverished and disgraced in the eyes of their richer caste-fellows.

Another source of turbulence were the grazing and semi-nomadic communities of this agricultural frontier area, designated by such caste names as Gujars, Bhattis, and Rangars. These people, lately lords of the grazing grounds and denizens of a mobile economy, found their local dominance challenged by the settlement of regular peasant cultivators as the arable area fitfully expanded after 1850. Here then was a classic example of the very general conflict between farmer and herdsman, confounded by the complex politics of the petty kingdoms north and west of Delhi.

Finally, Stokes introduces the petty Muslim gentry of districts such as Saharanpur as a potential source of revolt. In many ways groups such as the Barha Sayyids were in an analogous position

to the Rajput petty proprietors, degraded by political change to the status of reluctant cultivators. But there were differences. For this Muslim gentry had fewer roots in village society than even the Rajputs, being descended in the main from the owners of grants of land made by vanished Muslim powers; in many areas, they only had a toe-hold in the economy of the villages and were thus more vulnerable still to excessive revenue demands and political change. In addition the ideology of Islam provided an independent incentive to revolt, though one which was often hedged around by local rivalries and loyalties.

4

REBELLION IN THE COUNTRYSIDE: THE DELHI REGION AND HARYANA

PART of the failure of the rebel movement at Delhi lay in the failure to establish a liberated area. Bahadur Shah had remained a king without a kingdom. Mutual fear and distrust prevented the dispatch of columns to occupy the surrounding region and set up a regular form of royal administration. Yet there was no want of revolutionary tinder. The fall of Delhi to the mutineers on 11 May had been followed by the almost immediate collapse of British administration in the countryside and by waves of rural disturbance which had billowed outwards and reached up into the Punjab as far as the Ambala, Ludhiana, and Firozpur districts. Throughout northern India, the response of different regions to the abrupt withdrawal of the British power varied largely. The sudden failure of the artificial bureaucratic frame in which Mughal and Briton had encased disparate communities and forms of economy was the signal for local society to resolve itself back into its constituent elements. In some regions the process was inherently a violent one, starting as rebellion against government officials and ending as a struggle for the successor authority. This was the case in the Delhi district and the region known as Haryana.

Once the traveller leaves the Jumna river on which Delhi stands, and the adjacent rich *bangar* cultivation, he enters a region that grows steadily more arid as he progresses westwards to the semi-desert tracts of Rajasthan some two hundred miles away. Contrasted with the teeming population of the Doab districts the land is thinly peopled, and in the mid-nineteenth century the forms of society evinced many of those features typical of the interaction between the desert and the sown. The tribal structure of society was everywhere in evidence, and the pastoral way of life still vied with agriculture. Yet change was also afoot, and was to be seen most starkly in the westernmost of the British districts, that of Sirsa, known at that time as the Bhattiana Agency. Here after the terrible famine of the *chalisa* (1783–4) the country had been given over to

the warring activities of fierce wandering pastoralists, belonging to 'pure' and 'impure' Rajput lineages, among whom the Bhattis and the heterogeneous group loosely known as Pachadas (or westerners) were the most prominent. Occupying the watercourses of the Ghaggar, the Sutlej, and other fitful streams, they also ranged with their herds and flocks over the intervening scrub and sandy wastes which in favourable seasons were clothed by the monsoon rains in a variety of grasses and shrubs. But in the early decades of the nineteenth century, Jat colonists pressed in from the Sikh states of Patiala, Nobhe, and Jhind to the north-east and from the Rajput states of Bikaner and Jaisalmer to the south-west and founded permanent agricultural settlements. From 1837 the British administrators began to demarcate their boundaries in the prairie land, allowing some 3,000 acres to each village settlement (*mauza*), a process that was completed between 1853 and 1857 when the whole prairie was divided off. Inevitably the pastoralists resented the loss of their grazing grounds to the immigrant groups who now outnumbered them; they had already suffered a loss of political consequence under the tightening yoke of the white ruler, who in 1818 had deposed the Bhatti nawab and left his descendants to live on as impoverished pensioners. But above all, the balance between pastoralism and agriculture had been decisively tilted against them, and the old pastoral tribes who had loved 'bare hills and stunted trees and were the last to choose the settled ground' found themselves forced away from the old cattle-raising and cattle-lifting life towards the boredom and degradation of the plough.[1]

In the Hissar and Rohtak districts this tendency was still more marked. Here Jat settlement was thicker and older, and had been reinforced by the reopening of the Western Jumna Canal, which proved its value after the famines of the 1830s in extending the area of secure agriculture. The clash between the two cultures of the lordly pastoralist and the industrious agriculturalist was hardened by a cleavage of religion, for almost all the Rajput and quasi-Rajput pastoralist tribes had long since accepted Islam, and were collectively known as Rangars in consequence.[2] One outlet for

[1] On Sirsa, see *Sirsa SR 1879–83* by J. Wilson (Calcutta, 1894), pp. 87–8, 318, 323. Also *Hissar District Gazeteer 1892*, by J. Fagan (Lahore, 1893).

[2] D. Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes* (Lahore, 1916), p. 139. Rajputs, especially Muslim Rajputs, progressively declined in numbers proportionate to Jats from Sirsa, through Hissar, to Rohtak. Percentage figures of the 1881 Census were:

	Rajput	Jat
Sirsa	18.5	25.3

them in a world going awry was military service. Apart from enlisting in the regular regiments of the East India Company's army, they also filled the ranks of the local Haryana Light Infantry and 14th Irregular cavalry. It was the outbreak among these troops at the end of May at Hansi, Hissar, and Sirsa that touched off rebellion. At Sirsa after the European officials fled, the mutineers plundered the treasury and then marched off to join their comrades at Hansi. The resulting disturbances took on a communal tincture, since adversity had drawn the Rajput groups together to overcome their own internal feuds and to present a more or less united front.

> The Hindu inhabitants of the town of Sirsa fled in dismay chiefly to Bikaner territory, and the Muhammedan population of the surrounding villages rose *en masse* and began to plunder the town and the neighbouring Hindu villages. The Tahsildar of Sirsa, the Revenue Sarishtadar and the Kotwali Muharrir were murdered and the records of the District Office were torn and scattered about . . . The destruction of property was most wanton. Whatever the insurgents were unable to carry away they burned or broke to pieces and for a time the most violent portion of the population had it all its own way. The Ranghars and Pachadas of Hissar and the Bhattis of Sirsa at once took advantage of the subversion of British rule to revert to their old predatory habits and the district was at once plunged into utter anarchy and confusion.[3]

Of the origin of Muslim fury there could be little doubt. In the cool, detached language of the administrator, James Wilson took note that even thirty years later, the Muslims still hankered after their lost rights in the prairie. The Muslims tried to regain their lands 'and it was partly for this reason, and partly owing to the survival of their former predatory habits, that in the mutiny many of them seized the opportunity to plunder their defenceless Hindu neighbours'.[4]

Despite the martial spirit of the region, this internecine strife wrecked the prospects of successful local rebellion. The titular

Hissar	12.1	26.8
Rohtak	5.4	33

(See Ibbetson, op. cit., p. 28.)

[3] *Hissar DG 1892*, p. 43. It is to be noted that the Tunwar Jatu Rajput section remained loyal to the government because they were at variance with the Sadh section which had rebelled; Munshi Amin Chand, *Hissar SR 1875* (Lahore, 1875), p. 7.

[4] *Sirsa SR 1879–83*, pp. 88–9.

Bhatti nawab of Rania set himself at the head of the rebels at Sirsa, and a petty customs official, Muhammad Azim, apparently the son of prince Akbar, declared himself a Shahzada or royal prince and went off to Delhi for assistance. But there was little time for organization to emerge. The threat that the disturbances in Sirsa would spread up and across the Sutlej into the heart of the Punjab led to the rapid dispatch of a small force of Sikhs under the former mercenary general Van Corlandt, the Deputy Commissioner of Firozpur, who by 20 June had recovered Sirsa and by 17 July, Hissar. The Bhattis turned out in strength, opposing Van Corlandt with some 5,000 men, but they were no match for his column supported by two guns. By the time Muhammad Azim returned from Delhi in mid-August with a commission to collect revenue and a force of Haryana troops numbering some 1,500 cavalry, 500 infantry, and three guns, the British-led garrison at Hissar was well prepared, and decisively repulsed the Shahzada.[5] Yet the real rebel failure was the failure to carry the Jat agriculturalists with them. Some of the Jat Sikhs might join in the general plundering, but for the most the Jats maintained 'a strictly defensive attitude'.

Sirsa and Hissar were a far cry from Delhi, and it was the districts closer at hand that were clearly of more critical importance for determining whether a liberated zone was to be established around the ancient capital. Yet the same pattern tended to repeat itself, though in a more muted and complicated manner. The initial elements of disturbance among the civil population were usually the tatterdemalion Rangar groups who made only a pretence at pursuing agriculture and whose true occupation was cattle-rustling and salt-smuggling or military service for any who would hire them. When the 60th NI from Ambala finally threw off their officers at Rohtak on 10 June, it was the Rangars of the district who took up the torch of rebellion. 'The Ranghars and the butchers set up the Muhammadan green flag, and round it all the bad characters of the country collected, and lawlessness ruled supreme in the district till the middle of September.' Such at least was the British view of things set out later in the district gazetteer.[6]

[5] *Hissar DG 1892*, p. 44. Jiwan Lal, 6 and 23 Aug., *TNN*, pp. 184, 205. Muir's information from Greathed was that the rebel force consisted of only 150 Haryana Light Infantry, 900 horses and 2 guns; Muir to Harlech, 24 Aug. 1857; Muir, *Intelligence Records*, i. 142.

[6] *Rohtak DG 1883–4*, pp. 26–7.

Yet still closer to Delhi the number of so-called Rangars was small. Of a similar character were the Meos or Mewattis of the Gurgaon district, to the south-west of Delhi. These too were an Islamicized group of putative Rajput stock who had at one time dominated the region from their fastnesses in the dry Aravalli hill ranges, their main settlements running eastwards from Alwar state through the parganas of Firozpur and Nuh. Here below the low hills they practised an indifferent and unthrifty agriculture, sinking few wells and being exposed to periodical drought. Their fertility had made them the largest group in the district population; in 1849 they were said to number 110,000 and to possess some 409 villages covering 300,000 acres.[7] They kept a close, tribal organization, in which there were a dozen main branches or *pals* and supposedly some fifty-two *gots*.[8]

To the east on the more fertile loams of the Jumna *bangar* lay the region of predominantly Jat settlement in the Palwal *tahsil*. Though fewer in numbers, the Jats were strikingly more prosperous. They still looked to the adjoining Bharatpur state to the south, whose famous raja, Suraj Mal, in the mid-eighteenth century had 'extended his rule over the south and south-east of the district, practising horrible cruelties on the Meos in endeavouring to bring them under subjection'.[9] British settlement officers in reflecting on the disparities of agricultural wealth among different caste groups had recourse to an instinctive belief in the finity of ethnological types, a secular variant in its way of the doctrine of original sin and original virtue. 'Whatever be the nature of the soil he cultivates or the incidence of the revenue he pays, the caste of the agriculturalist, which determines his habits, his customs and natural disposition, will determine his economic condition.'[10] On this reckoning the Meos were born losers, a proud failing community who were naturally the first to break into violence in May 1857. At the outset they hurled themselves on the small townships of Palwal, Sohna, Firozpur, and Nuh in an orgy of plunder.[11] When the British came to recover the district after the recapture of Delhi, it was the Meos

[7] *Gurgaon Statistics* (1849) by Fraser; cited Muir, *Intelligence Records*, i. 261.
[8] *Gurgaon SR 1882*, by F. C. Channing, pp. 29–30.
[9] *Idem*, p. 18.
[10] Statement made by J. R. Wilson to the Famine Commission; cited *Gurgaon SR 1882*, p. 39.
[11] *Gurgaon SR 1882*, p. 24. Also account by G. F. Harvey, *Narrative of Events Regarding the Mutiny*, iA, pp. 8, 17.

who withstood them in fierce encounter. Brigadier Showers's column was engaged for weeks in the work of pacification. Some fifty villages were burned in reprisal, the so-called 'Mewatti movement' running through the region traditionally known as Mewar and comprising Alwar and part of Bharatpur state.[12]

Yet if they were nature's freedom-fighters, they proved almost as much of an initial problem for the rebel regime in Delhi. On 15 May, perhaps to rid the King of his fractious sons, Mirza Amin-u-din Khan was ordered to Firozpur to arrange for a Muslim Administration, and to raise a force of Mewattis. But two days later it was learned that another party of mutineers sent out to bring in the treasure abandoned by the British at Gurgaon had been attacked by 'a body of Mewattis' and reinforcements had to be dispatched to rescue it.[13]

The Meos had their own local grievances irrespective of the higher controlling power, and their long-smouldering resentment against the Jats broke out as opportunity occurred. In the northern part of the district, in the Bahora pargana, Jat settlement was scantier. The light, sandy *bhur* soils, bearing a stiff revenue assessment, required little effort to work, but the Jat agriculturalists found more in common with the industrious Ahir peasantry of the neighbouring Rewari *tahsil* than with the Meos, who were, however, becoming fair agriculturalists.[14] In the turmoil of 1857, the Jats placed themselves under the protection of the Ahir chief, Rao Tula Ram, who took over Rewari on the collapse of British administration and who coveted Bahora which his family had formerly ruled. On the fall of Delhi in September 1857, Tula Ram fled, believing himself compromised by his attempts to secure Bahadur Shah's recognition of his claims to Bahora. The Meo villages of the pargana which had refused to acknowledge Tula Ram's authority, and had been burned and plundered in consequence, now sought their revenge.

[12] Muir, *Intelligence Records*, i. 289.

[13] Jiwan Lal, 15, 17, 19 May; *TNN*, pp. 90, 95, 97. Cf. another newswriter; *FSUP* v. 987. Chuni Lal's Newsletter, 15 May, stated that the attackers were 'near 300 Mewatis and Goojurs'; PP 1859 (1st Sess.), xviii. 216. For another Mewatti attack, see *idem*, p. 215.

[14] Cf. John Lawrence's Settlement Report for the Bahara pargana, dated 4 Aug. 1838, pp. 25–6, in *Selected Reports on the Revised Settlement under Regulation IX of 1833 in the Delhie Territory*, No. 1 (Agra, 1846); hereafter *Sel. Reps. Rev. Settle. Delhie Territory*.

The Jats of the village of Bahora live in continual dread of their powerful and turbulent Meo neighbours, and so aided Tula Ram in his short sway. But when his power collapsed, they were at once attacked by the Meos; the conflict took place at Jourassi, where the Jats assembled. For two days the fight lasted, but the Jats were driven back on the small conical hill close to the village, and there one hundred and eleven Jats, Ahirs and Brahmins are said to have fallen; the Meo loss was eighty.[15]

Yet it would be wrong to suppose that rural politics could be conducted always in simple clear-cut tribal terms. Densely settled clan groups like the Meos and Jats were subject to their own internal factionalism which drove them into alliances that cut across the vertical divisions of tribal kinship. The township of Hodal, on the main road running south from Delhi to Mathura, was held by the Surot *got* of Jats, together with the surrounding villages. The Surot Jats had an alliance with the Pathan village of Seoli, which in turn had a long-standing feud over disputed ownership rights to a village with the neighbouring Rawat Jats. At the same time, the Rawats were at feud with the Chirklot *pal* of the Meos, their western neighbours, in a similar quarrel over land rights. The result was that the Rawats, attacked on both east and west, struck up an alliance with the Rajputs of Hathin, as well as calling in the British for some short-lived assistance against the Chirklot Meos. The fight is said to have gone on for months and was conducted with peculiar courtesies.[16]

The Meos also had their own hereditary internal quarrels to resolve. One split the Chirklot *pal* in Firozpur *tahsil*, west of Hodal, and a good deal of plundering and village-burning resulted.

The Meos were a localized group in the Delhi region. Much more scattered were the Gujars with whom they tended to be loosely confused. In the Delhi district itself the Gujars numbered no more than

[15] *Gurgaon SR 1882*, p. 26. Rao Tula Ram's attempts to secure recognition of his claims to Bahora are chronicled by Jiwan Lal, *TNN*, pp. 164, 170, 196.

[16] *Gurgaon SR 1882*, pp. 24–5. Ford, the Collector of Gurgaon, left the district on 15 May, but returned with a small force of Bharatput horse to Hodal on 20 May and remained there until 29 May when he moved temporarily to Palwal. Harvey, the Agra Commissioner, who arrived at Hodal on 26 May, reported later that 'We found in the neighbourhood of Hodul a good disposition towards the British Government; but the Mewatees and Goojur tribes, after their instincts, were turning out for pillage and plunder'. Clearly Harvey was neither the man nor had the opportunity to observe the complexities of the local political situation; G. F. Harvey's account *NE* iA, p. 8. Ford and Harvey managed to stay on near Sohna until the end of June, when the increasing insubordination of their Jaipur and Bharatpur troops forced them to evacuate the district.

22,000 by the 1880s, but their villages ringed the city and they were the first to lead the movement of rural plundering. Immediately to the north of the walled city near the Jumna river was the Gujar village of Chandrawal, and it was from here that the Gujars issued to ravage the abandoned British cantonment and the suburb of Sabzi Mandi. The rebel regime found itself forced at the outset to take repressive action and on 14 May a force was ordered out under Mirza Abu Bakr to chastise them.[17] To the south of the city, the Jat raja of the petty territory of Ballabgarh complained of a similar Gujar uprising and used it as a pretext for failing to attend in person at Bahadur Shah's court.[18] The King's messengers sent to recruit aid from the ruler of Alwar returned in sorry plight on 18 May unable to get through.

> The two sowars [horsemen] who had been sent with the missive to Alwar returned, and reported that thousands of Goojurs were infesting the road and committing highway robberies; that they had robbed them of their horses, clothes and money; that they had taken the King's letter, and, tearing it up, had put the pieces back into their hands; and that it was after much entreaty and supplication they were prevailed on to give back their horses.[19]

These Gujar disturbances were trivial compared with the furious uprising that occurred to the south-east across the Jumna in the Bulandshahr district, or indeed with those that broke out immediately to the east of Meerut, for these latter were the regions of much thicker Gujar settlement. The Gujars in the immediate vicinity of Delhi were too few to constitute a serious and permanent security problem for the rebel regime, which soon learned to buy them off by employing them as irregulars. They are instructive for displaying one of the sources of natural turbulence, but they fitted all too easily into the British caste typology. It was a comforting illusion for administrators like William Muir, proud of the work of the North-Western Provinces administration, that the great mass of the peasantry had not joined in rebellion and that rural violence could largely be attributed to the fact that 'the present weakness of Government has encouraged the wild and pillaging part of the

[17] Jiwan Lal, 14 May; *TNN*, pp. 90–1. Aruni Lal, 14 May; PP 1859 (1st Sess.), xviii. 214.

[18] For petitions of Raj Naher Singh, see PP 1859, xviii, pp. 140–3. Also Chuni Lal's account, *idem*, p. 215.

[19] Chuni Lal, 18 May; PP 1859 (1st Sess.), xviii. 217.

population to rise against authority'.[20] The Gujars were natural scapegoats. The British were fond of quoting the local proverbs against them:

> Kutta, billi, do; Rangar, Gujar do
> Yih char na ho—to khule kiware so.
> (The dog and the cat are two; the Rangar and Gujar are two,
> If it were not for these four, one could sleep with an open door.)[21]

The Delhi Gujars got a particularly bad press from Maconachie, the settlement officer in the 1870s:

> It appears probable that Gujars have lived in this part of the country from very remote periods; and they occupied the hills because no one else cared to do so, and because their solitary and inaccessible tracts afforded better scope for the Gujar's favourite avocation, cattle-lifting. But though he has thus possessed two qualifications of a Highlander—a hilly home, and a covetous desire for other people's cattle, he never seems to have had the love of fighting, and the character for manly independence which distinguished this class elsewhere. On the contrary the Gujar has generally been a mean, sneaking cowardly fellow, and I don't know that he improves much with the march of civilisation . . .

The peri-urban Gujar had inevitably lost much of his traditional way of life, and had taken to petty thieving and operating a disarming protection racket. 'All the Chaukidars [night-watchmen] of the civil station are drawn from this tribe who for the consideration of five rupees per month waive their prerogative of housebreaking.' Yet in reality the British were caricaturing the activities of occupational and not caste groups. Even among the small category returned as Gujars in the Delhi district noticeable differences were observable. Where the Gujar had succeeded in obtaining good land and had forsaken cattle-lifting, he soon became almost indistinguishable from the more industrious agricultural castes. It was true that in the dry hill (*kohi*) tract of the Ballabgarh *tahsil* the cultivators were still in the 1870s 'nearly all improvident, lazy, and thriftless Gujars; many of them . . . poor and none of them in more than average circumstances', their villages were 'almost entirely kacha huts with reed-roofs leaky and old; the men themselves originally thieves, showed badly at the time of the mutiny, and are not conspicuously loyal at present [1878]'.[22] Yet on the nearby

[20] Muir to his brother, 2 June 1857; Muir, *Intelligence Records*, i. 35.

[21] This is the version that Ibbetson gave for Karnal; *Karnal SR 1872–80*, p. 84. Maconachie had a variant for the Delhi district; *Delhi SR 1872–1883*, p. 88.

[22] *Delhi SR 1872–80* (1882), pp. 204–5.

fertile *bangar* tract where the Gujars clustered about the village of Tigaon, four miles east of Ballabgarh, it had to be acknowledged that the Gujars 'were better agriculturalists than their brothers of the hills', and Maconachie grudgingly allowed 'perhaps some difference of morality' in their favour.[23] As early as 1838, John Lawrence had offered the opinion that the character of the agriculturalist was more powerfully influenced by the remunerativeness or otherwise of agriculture rather than by his caste affiliation.[24]

Yet if the less agriculturally oriented elements among the Rangars, Meos, and Gujars were prominent in igniting rural violence in the Delhi region, they were too few or too localized to give a permanent direction to local politics. For this, one must turn to elements of greater weight in rural society—to the bulk of the peasantry and to the local magnates.

The Delhi region was the home of the Indian 'village republics' celebrated by Metcalfe in a memorable passage which so caught Marx's imagination that it formed the basis of his theory of the unchanging basis of Indian agrarian society:

> The Village Communities are little Republics, having nearly everything they want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds to revolution; Hindu, Patan, Mughul, Mahratta, Sikh, English, are masters in turn; but the village communities remain the same.[25]

Metcalfe was referring to the Jat clan communities which ran the length of the Jumna *bangar* from Mathura in the south to Ambala in the north, where they blended into the large ill-defined group of peoples of the Punjab, called Jat. John Lawrence, when serving as an official in the Delhi Territory, filled in the outlines of Metcalfe's

[23] *Idem*, pp. 193, 89. Immediately to the south in the adjoining *tahsil* of Palwal in the Gurgaon district, the adjustment of Gujar habits probably postdated the 1857 Mutiny Rebellion. They tended to use arable land as grazing ground and were contumacious in resisting the revenue demand. Eight of their villages passed ultimately to the Skinner Estate; *Gurgaon SR 1872–83*, pp. 32–3, 99. But by the 1870s they were reformed characters, with a low crime rate, and withstanding the famine conditions of 1877–8, in James Wilson's view, 'better than the Jats, and almost as well as the Ahirs'; Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes*, p. 184 n.

[24] J. Lawrence, Settlement Report on Bahara pargana, Gurgaon, cited above.

[25] C. T. Metcalfe, Revenue Minute, 17 Nov. 1830; cited *in extenso*, Spear, *Twilight of the Mughals*, p. 117. Marx found the passage, of course, in the Parliamentary Papers. For Marx, see D. Thorner, 'Marx on India and the Asiatic Mode of Production', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, ix (1966).

picture. In 1844, he wrote of the flourishing state of the southern pargana:

> . . . we have no large zamindar with his lac or two lacs of annual income, but on the other hand, we have thousands of small proprietors each with his brood mare, his buffaloes, his oxen, in short, with every thing that marks a comfortable position in life. In no part of the Western Provinces, of which I have had experience, are the tenures so complete and so well recognized as here, no districts where the ancient village communities are in such an excellent state of preservation, or where the practice of our civil courts has hitherto done so little harm.[26]

But it was to the north and west of Delhi that Jat agriculture reached its height. Lawrence described the *bangar* tract of the Sonepat *tahsil* in 1836 as a perfect garden, where one could ride for miles and see nothing but the most splendid cultivation.[27]

This idyllic picture was put to a severe test in 1857. It was the assumption that the Jat, the 'pillar of the state', would stand by the British, since no group had benefited more obviously from the *pax Britannica* and the extension of canal irrigation. But who were the Jats? In one sense they were simply an occupational category denoting the great peasant farmer class of the region. Their most striking feature was the solidity of their occupation of the soil, which bore all the characteristics of tribal possession. In some parganas of the Rohtak district, Jats formed nearly 80 per cent of the agricultural population.[28] 'So essentially is the Jat a husbandman, and so especially is he *the* husbandman of these parts, that when asked his caste he will quite as often reply *zamindar* [viz. peasant landholder] as Jat, the two names being used in that sense as synonymous.'[29] In the mid-eighties, after the Mutiny confiscations had incorporated much non-Jat territory on the south, the Jats still cultivated some 67 per cent of the entire Rohtak district and held 366 of the 511 villages. Tribal possession on this scale was unusual in the more densely settled districts of the Doab, where society was fragmented into a much larger scatter of caste groups created as a result of layer upon layer of earlier conquest and settlement and the stronger influence of Brahminical ideas.

26 Cited in *Delhi SR 1872–80*, p. 150.

27 *Idem*.

28 M. R. Gubbins, Settlement Reports of Pergunnah Rohtuc Beree and Gohana, 1839; *Sel. Reps. Rev. Settl. Delhie Territory*, No. 1.

29 Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes*, p. 126.

Haryana had, of course, known many waves of invaders, but its fundamental physical and economic condition gave a much more homogeneous and undifferentiated structure to its landholding class. In a region of insecure agriculture abutting on to the desert, periodically desolated by drought and then gradually re-peopled, the tenurial basis of society was determined by the conditions of constant over-abundance of land and shortage of hands to work it. Hence the agricultural class was characterized by a social system that encouraged the rapid expansion of its numbers and the mobilization of their labour power. Marriage customs were lax. The Jats practised an easy polygamy, as well as fraternal polyandry, allowed *karewa* or widow remarriage, and adopted strangers into the tribe.[30] They also put their women to heavy work in the fields. These conditions inhibited the growth of sharp caste differentiation. There was no room for a *hobereau* or squireen class lording it over the village like the Rajput *thakurs* of the Doab districts, who restricted the proliferation of their lineages by stricter marriage customs and by female infanticide, and hardly in any instance exceeded more than 10 per cent of the population in any district. The dominance of the *thakur* was possible only where secure agriculture and the pressure of population on the soil gave land a rentable value and permitted an incipient landlord–tenant differentiation. In the districts west of the Jumna there was little question of such a restricted 'proprietary' group drawing tribute from a substantial body of 'non-proprietary' cultivators. The Jat tenures were for the most part of the *bhaiachara* type, in which each member of the proprietary body was cultivator and in which the permanent cultivators were almost all incorporated in the proprietary body.

The theory of the British land revenue system after 1833 was that the State should exact some two-thirds of the economic rental value of the soil, and settlement officers were instructed to discover examples of genuine freewill competitive rents in order to frame so-called rent rates for different soils in a pargana as a whole. Yet in Rohtak, where the settlement officers could still exploit the non-regulation tradition of the Delhi Territory to cock a snook at administrative fiats issuing from Agra, Martin Gubbins in 1839 cheerfully reported: 'Rent rates do not exist in this district. Land

[30] On admission of strangers, see Ibbetson, *Karnal SR 1872–80* (Allahabad, 1883), p. 75. On marriage customs, see M. C. Pradhan, *The Political System of the Jats of Northern India* (London, 1966), pp. 82 ff.

being in greater abundance than hands to cultivate it—proprietors are generally glad to rent their lands to non-proprietors, at the same rates of revenue which they themselves pay. None have accordingly been framed.'[31]

If economic conditions did not encourage social differentiation within the village community, it might be supposed that out of the larger tribal or clan framework in which each village community was set, some form of political hierarchy would emerge. Yet the Jats of Rohtak, Hissar, and Karnal, as well as the Delhi district, were innocent of monarchical forms, although to the south in Bharatpur and to the north in the Sikh states of Jhind and Patiala rajas ruled over strong Jat communities. Instead Jat politics functioned in terms of leagues and alliances framed out of the competing loyalties of kinship and territory. The clan or *got* was in no sense a political entity. As a kinship group it tended to disperse itself through migration, and although each settlement formed for the most part a territorial bloc, these were separated and interspersed with the settlements of other clans. In the Rohtak district in 1881, the 192,832 persons classified as Jats were divided among 12 major and 137 minor clans. No one clan numbered more than 16,800 and most of the major clans varied between 1,500 and 6,000, but their scatter was much wider than the district limits. For example, the Ghatwal (or Malik), Sahrawat, Ahlawat, and Deswal *gots* all had substantial numbers living in the Delhi, Gurgaon, Karnal, and Hissar districts.[32] The local unit of clan organization above the village was the *tappa*, but this was primarily a territorial rather than a kinship grouping. Gubbins in 1839 defined it as

> a cluster of villages, owning the supremacy of one tuppadary village, generally the largest among them, and forming together a separate body corporate. The tuppa generally includes, without reference to caste, the villages immediately surrounding the tuppadary mouza; and the connexion may therefore be supposed to have found its origin in those disturbed times, when small detached villages were unknown, and unions like these were necessary for the protection of even large communities.[33]

[31] Settlement Report of Pergunnah Gohana, p. 86; *Sel. Reps. Rev. Settl. Delhie Territory*, No. 1. The above account of *thakur*-dominated villages in the Doab did not mean that in certain parts Rajputs could not proliferate and drive out the original cultivating class so as to form *bhaiachara*-type communities similar in some respects to that of the Jats described above.

[32] *Rohtak DG 1883–4*, p. 60. On scatter of clan across the districts, cf. Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes*, pp. 128–9, although he considers his figures for Ghatwals in Karnal to be well below the true mark.

[33] M. R. Gubbins, op. cit., p. 57.

The dominant landholding Jat clan group exerted political control over a given area which would include villages held by weaker Jat clans, Brahmins, or others; and in olden times the structure had been reinforced by being made the local unit of revenue settlement by the Mughal revenue officers. Given overwhelming Jat preponderance, it was inevitable that the traditional struggle for territory and pre-eminence should take the form of feuding among the Jat *tappas*. In 1857, these feuds burst out anew:

> The Dahiya and Dalal Jats in Sampla engaged in perpetual quarrels, which centred round Hassangarh; the Ahlawat Jats attacked Sampla, but were beaten off, with the help of Ismailah. In Gohana, Ahulana attacked Samri and Barodah; Madinah attacked Kathura; Butanah destroyed Nuran Khera; and all the headmen of Samri were hanged for attacking a military convoy . . .[34]

Many of these fights were little more than the breaking out of old feuds between adjacent *tappas* or even villages. But the larger political pattern spilled over the artificial British district boundaries. The adjoining Karnal district formed the corridor down which for centuries invading armies had passed on their way to Delhi, and the town of Panipat and nearby Kurukshetra had witnessed the greatest battles of Indian history. To periodic drought was added the desolation of armies. Here Afghan, Mughal, Sikh, and Maratha had fought for the mastery, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the British took over, the tract from Karnal southwards was said to be 'more than four-fifths . . . overrun by forest, and its inhabitants either removed or exterminated'.[35] It was the Jats who appear to have profited out of the long disorder of the eighteenth century and the subsequent recolonization, and had succeeded in displacing the Rajputs over considerable areas. But they did not achieve the decisive preponderance they obtained in Rohtak.

One of the clans most prominent in defeating the Mandhar Rajputs was the Ghatwal or Malak (Malik) Jats from Ahulana in Rohtak. Ibbetson recounted their colourful story:

> In the old days of Rajput ascendancy the Rajputs would not allow Jats to cover their heads with a turban, nor to put a crown (*mor*) on the heads of their bridegrooms, or a jewel (*nat*) in their women's noses. They also used

[34] *Rohtak SR 1873–79*, by H. C. Fanshawe, p.39.
[35] Ibbetson, *Karnal SR 1872–80*, p. 33.

to levy seignorial rights from virgin brides. Even to this day Rajputs will not allow inferior castes to wear red clothes or ample loin clothes in their villages. The Ghatwals obtained some successes over the Rajputs, especially over the Mandhars of the Doab, near Deoban and Manglaur, and over those of the Bagar near Kalanaur and Dadri, and removed the obnoxious prohibitions. They then acquired the title of *malak* (master) and a red turban as their distinguishing mark; and to this day a Jat with a red *pagri* [Turban] is most probably a Ghatwal.[36]

The disproportionate success of the Ghatwals provoked the jealousy of Dehia (Dahiya) Jats to the south in Sonepat *tahsil* of the Delhi district, where it abutted on to their settlements in Rohtak in the north-east of the Sampla *tahsil*. As a result the Dehias allied themselves with the Mandhar Rajputs of the Nardak, the arid pastoral tract lying to the west of Karnal town. The split in the Jat ranks aligned the whole country into two factions (*khap*) named the Dehia and Haulania. Most of the Jats of the *bangar* adhered to the Ghatwals, but the Dehias were joined by the small Huda and Latmar clans of Rohtak and the *tappa* of Naultha in Karnal, where the Jaglan Jats held twelve villages. In addition the Gujars and Tagas of Karnal joined the Dehia faction which presumably represented the league of the defeated. In the absence of any dominant magnate leadership, it was this large-scale factional division which traditionally ordered the wider politics of the Karnal, Rohtak, and Sonepat areas, and it is easy to read its pattern into the local disturbances of 1857.

Contemporary British observers could not see this far. Indeed, C. T. Le Bas, who was temporary Magistrate at Karnal during the period of the siege of Delhi, and who as a former magistrate claimed to know the district, interpreted the disturbances in the region with the usual crude typology which contrasted the natural turbulence of the Rangars and the Gujars with the general peacefulness of the settled agricultural Jat communities. He took pride in the shrewdness with which he had bought over the predatory Rangars of the Nardak by enlisting some 300 for service. This helped, he believed, ward off the threat from Karnal town. In this way he claimed he had kept the Grand Trunk Road open at the critical hour when the British were delivering their first riposte against the rebel capital. Yet into this simple hypothesis of caste response, there came the inexplicable exception of fierce resistance

[36] *Idem*, p. 82.

put up by the large Jat village of Bulleh or Balla, some eighteen miles south-west of Karnal, when troopers were sent out to collect the revenue instalment at the beginning of July. Le Bas's original hypothesis had to be modified in a disturbing fashion:

> The Bulleh zemindars are a remarkable instance of wanton and causeless recusancy. They did not care a straw for the mock royal family of Delhi. They did not pretend to have anything whatever to complain of. It would be difficult to find a more thriving and prosperous set of agriculturalists. Their revenue is 6,5000 rupees, they could easily pay double the amount. The land is watered by a branch of the canal. The crops are magnificent . . . When the village was entered by our men, tons upon tons of grain were found, and great quantities of ghee, sugar, etc. . . . Yet these men wantonly refused to pay their revenue, and expelled the sowars sent to collect it. Bulleh had waxed fat, and now kicked. If Exeter Hall should maintain that such of the country people as have joined the rebellion have been driven to despair by poverty and oppression, let Bulleh be quoted to refute the assertion. Of the smaller zamindars the most prosperous have often been foremost among the disloyal. The Bulleh people believed that the Government was paralysed, and they thought we could not compel them to pay their revenue. They were speedily undeceived.[37]

Le Bas was silent about other more glaring examples of resistance to the British. The Nardak had indeed been far from pacified; in fact Le Bas had simply quietened the Chauhan clan by offering them service, while the dominant Mandhars gave a good deal of trouble, refusing to pay their revenue and raiding to the south of the district. The Jats similarly were defiant at other places than Balla. Denzil Ibbetson was the first to chronicle these outbreaks in 1883:

> Sixteen of the largest Jat villages in the Naultha *zail* [district] refused to pay their revenue, drove out the Government village watchmen, joined in the disturbances in the Rohtak district, went to Delhi whence they returned after an absence of 22 days, and threatened to attack the Collector's camp. Nineteen other large villages, mostly in the Bhalsi and Korana *zails*, rioted, burnt some Government buildings and refused to pay revenue. The Gujars were, of course, not behind hand, and plundered generally about the country.[38]

As Ibbetson half discerned, the division between Haulania and Dehia factions provided a more convincing explanation of the

[37] Memoir of C. T. Le Bas, n.d.; PP 1857, xliv, pt. 3, p. 878.
[38] Ibbetson, *Karnal SR 1872–80*, pp. 36–7.

wider pattern of the disturbances. Resistance to the British came from the Dehias and their allies, the Jaglan clan of Naultha *zail*, the Gujars, and the Mandhars of the Nardak. Balla appears to have been a Jat village on the edge of the Nardak tract which was linked with the Mandhars politically, and it was noticeable that when the British bore down upon it the whole Nardak rallied to its aid. We are told that 'signal chastisement was inflicted in a fight in which scarcely a village in the higher Nardak had but one or two killed or wounded'.[39] The Gathwals or Malaks who headed the rival Haulania faction appear in contrast to have been much more friendly towards the British. Their headquarters were at Ahaluana in the Gohana *tahsil* of Rohtak district. Alone in the district, the Government buildings at Gohana were preserved inviolate from attack and Chaudri Rustam Ali continued to conduct the local administration from the *tahsili*.

In all probability, however, the traditional pattern of local politics was interwoven with a much more direct response of the peasantry to their fortunes under British rule. For since there was no intervening magnate class, the British administration bore directly on the peasantry, and clan communities like those of the Jats had the organization and the temperament to register an instant populist response. Despite the encomiums of John Lawrence on the flourishing state of Jat agriculture, his post-Mutiny successors made no secret of their astonishment at the gross overassessment which had been practised throughout the old Delhi Territory. Fanshawe in 1880 could state bluntly that the assessment fixed by Martin Gubbins and others in the Rohtak parganas in 1837–40 was so severe that even with the substantial price rise that had occurred since the 1860s, it would still be impossible to think of realizing a demand based on the incidence of its revenue rates. He concluded that 'though such a climax of misery as Mr. Ibbetson had described at Panipat, was never reached in Rohtak, there is no doubt that the injudiciously heavy revenue must have greatly retarded the progress of the district'.[40] Moderation came in 1842 when a general revision of the settlements in the Delhi Territory was ordered by Thomason, the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces. In Rohtak district the effect was immediate. Between 1840 and 1847 cultivation expanded in the Gohana *tahsil*

[39] *Idem*, p. 37.
[40] *Roktak SR 1873–79*, p. 103.

by a fifth, in Rohtak *tahsil* by a third, and in Sampla by nearly a tenth. Henceforth until 1857 Rohtak district was the only one in the North-Western Provinces to show a clear balance-sheet free of arrears.

Severe assessment did less damage to Jat *bhaiachara* communities than might be supposed. Though in extremities it might drive them to desert temporarily to the refuge of the Sikh states, it probably preserved and toughened their egalitarian constitution. A high demand left no room for private rents and for the consequent social differentiation between landlord and tenant groups. When the demand became truly excessive, the communities simply defaulted. The Delhi administration had always prided itself on its refusal to resort to public sale, but in any event there was little attraction for a speculator in buying up the titles of over-assessed refractory villages in which a stranger would not dare to show his head. Even in districts like Aligarh where public sale was a common penalty for revenue default, the tight clan communities had for long laughed defiance at the collector. In the absence of other bids he found himself forced to write off the balance of arrears and sell back the *zamindari* right to the communities for a few rupees.[41] For all their efforts to fix an invariable revenue demand for periods of twenty and thirty years, the British were forced to concede what amounted in effect to a fluctuating assessment, granting remissions for poor seasons and striking off arrears.

Karnal district was not so fortunate in its revenue history. Although from 1842 serious efforts to moderate the assessment were carried out, they gave only a partial relief. Some three-quarters of the Karnal portion of the district had been assigned in *jagir* to the Mandal nawabs of Karnal, a family as notorious for their oppressive mismanagement as their embarrassing loyalty. The Skinner estates were also substantial in the Panipat portion and bore an evil reputation for grasping exaction. The Mandals 'estate' extended over the greater part of the Nardak, where the Mandhar Rajputs lived a life reminiscent of the Bhattis in Sirsa. It was a wild tract and covered with open grassy plains separated by belts of thick jungle where once the Mughal emperors had hunted lion. The Nardak was but another name for the Kurukshetra or battlefield of the Pandavas and Kauravas of the classic epic, the *Mahabharata*,

[41] W. H. Smith, *Aligarh SR 1882*, p. 76.

which lay on this great plain.[42] Its villages were notorious for turbulence and crime:

> They were almost wholly held by Rajputs, proud, quarrelsome, and fearless: looking upon agriculture as derogatory, they were cattle graziers by profession, and cattle-lifters by hereditary taste. The few large villages in which they were concentrated were elevated far above the surrounding plain upon the accumulation of centuries, were surrounded by deep ditches and high walls with forts at the corners, could only be entered by strong gateways with massive doors, were composed of lofty houses which turned their loop-holed backs to the narrow winding streets, and were built almost entirely of brick. From these strongholds they drove forth their herds to pasture, while their servants tilled the scanty fields. Watchers on watch towers and high trees throughout the jungle constantly scanned the plain beneath; and on the approach of danger, men and cattle sought the shelter of the village, or found yet greater safety in the pathless intricacies of the forest.[43]

The Mandal *jagirdars* leant on the British police and legal system to enforce their oppressive demands until in 1847 the British felt bound to assume direct responsibility for the revenue assessment. But the cure was in some ways worse than the disease. Changing to a revenue collected in cash instead of kind, the settlement by Gubbins in 1857 actually raised instead of lowered the demand. The subsequent accumulation of arrears led to further revisions in 1852 and 1856 which still left the Nardak assessed higher than almost anywhere else in the Punjab, despite its aridity and agricultural insecurity.[44] There was more, therefore, than traditional factionalism to arm the Nardak Mandhars to resist the revenue collections in 1857. It was the British who had cast upon them the hated incubus of the Mandals from 1806, and instead of being released to stand upright they had been bowed from 1847 under a system still more rigorous and exacting. While the Jats were treated more fairly under a lower assessment and obtained the benefits of irrigation, the Mandal Rajputs enjoyed neither.

Edmonstone's settlement of 1842 of the Panipat pargana in the south was later hailed as a measure of equity and moderation. Yet the pitch of the assessment remained on any reckoning severe. Even

[42] *Karnal DG 1890*, p. 8.

[43] Ibbetson, *Karnal SR 1872–80*, pp. 54–5.

[44] *Idem*, pp. 57–62. See also Thomason's minute on the settlement of the Delhi Territory, 31 July 1845; *Sels. Recs. Govt. NWP: Mr Thomason's Despatches*, i. 85 ff.

after he had lowered the demand on the *khadir* by 15 per cent, its incidence fell at Rs. 2-11-0 per cultivated acre and he largely equalized the rates paid by Jats and Gujars. Ibbetson recognized more than thirty years later that it was essential to pay attention to the caste of cultivators, 'it being simply impossible to assess a Gujar village'.[45] Edmonstone's settlement gave little cause for Jat gratitude, and their turbulence in 1857 had something more positive behind it than mere hereditary predatoriness or their alliance with the Dehia faction. Under Edmonstone's settlement, the *bangar* tract of the Karnal and Panipat parganas where Jat occupation was heaviest appears to have been treated with relative leniency, the rate falling at Rs. 2-8-11 compared with something between Rs. 3-2-0 and Rs. 3-12-0 in the 1830s. But the priceless boon the British thought they have conferred in reopening the western Jumna canal and increasing the water supply was already beginning to show itself as a dreadful scourge. By 1842–3 the mortality from malaria in Karnal town was filling the cemetery so rapidly that the British had to remove the entire cantonment to Ambala. At the same time the canal was producing great tracts of waterlogged territory poisoned by the saline efflorescence known as *reh*. These effects seem to have been worst in the southern portion of the district. A medical inquiry in 1847 showed that some 58 per cent of the population of a sample of villages within half a mile of the Delhi branch of the canal were suffering from enlargement of the spleen and some 51 per cent from fever, while a high rate of infertility was reported. In 1856 the inhabitants of the worst-affected districts, despairing of ever meeting their revenue demand from fields destroyed by *reh* and waterlogging, fled to the neighbouring state of Jind. The subsequent inquiry conducted by J. W. Sherer painted a frightful picture of suffering, not merely from the effects of protracted disease but also from penury:

> The possible resources of the biswadars [shares] of several estates are now exhausted. They have borrowed money at extravagant interest; they have become the mere farm slaves of some Bania [moneylender-trader] residing in their village; they have sold the trees on their estates; they have sold their daughters; they have sold their silver ornaments and brass utensils, and as many of their cattle as it was possible to spare; and no conceivable source of income is any longer available.[46]

[45] *Idem*, p. 305.
[46] J. W. Sherer, cited *idem*, p. 69.

The effects of the canal were widespread but their incidence was startlingly unequal. Ibbetson later commented on the remarkable contrast. It was hardly possible to exaggerate the fertility of a large and populous Jat village, well raised out of the reach of the evils of swamp and *reh*, and with a sufficient supply of canal water; and especially was its condition prosperous if, with the exception of a block of rice land, irrigation was by the lift (*dal*) rather than the flow (*for*) method. But it was equally difficult to exaggerate the utterly abject misery of some of the villages most injured by *reh* and swamp, of which Baholi at the junction of the Hansi and Delhi branches of the canal was the most appalling example.[47]

Now the evidence would seem to suggest that the Dehia faction, which had originally been composed of the losing elements in the local power struggle before the British, had continued to fare worse under the white man's rule. Apart from the harsh assessment borne by the Mandhars of the Nardak and the Gujars of the *khadir*, the damage done by swamp and *reh* appears to have struck hardest at the Dehias, and to have left the Haulanias relatively untouched. Ibbetson's map showed that in Karnal district a few miles to the north-west of Panipat, held largely by Gujars, the *bangar* area was among the worst affected by *reh*. The same was the case in the Naultha division where the Jagland Jats were prominent in disturbance in 1857. Neighbouring districts exhibited something of the same pattern. In Rohtak the Ghatwals as leaders of the Haulania faction enjoyed canal irrigation without its disadvantages and remained quiet; other less lucky communities broke into revolt.

Peasant action required above all to be coordinated and generalized if it were to gain significant weight and direction. Marx's likening of the peasantry to a sack of potatoes scarcely applied to India where the village community was never so isolated economically or politically as he supposed.[48] Yet even in the region of solid Jat settlement it had been seen how kinship organization was insufficient alone to supply supra-village organization and had long been displaced or rather modified by the territorial unit of the *tappa*. The reason for this was not merely the dispersion of the major clans or *gots*, but that by constant lineage segmentation and political fission so many Jats fell outside the membership of the

[47] *Idem*, pp. 311–12, 70.

[48] For a survey of the question, see Eric Stokes, 'The First Century of British Colonial Rule in India', *Peasant and the Raj*, ch. 1, pp. 19–45.

major clans. Hence in a high proportion of cases, the kinship unit had become so pounded down and localized as to cease to provide any higher level of organization. Even in the Rohtak district where the clan and *tappa* system had survived much more vigorously than elsewhere, only half the Jat population in 1881 were comprised within the twelve major *gots*, the rest being grouped as 'miscellaneous Jats' in separate *tappas*. The *tappa* itself was only partially a natural growth from within rural society, and owed its stabilization to its use as the basic revenue-collection unit under the Mughal regime. The British had ignored it since they had settled the revenue directly with the village heads or *muqaddams*, while the *tappa* was far too small a unit to be used for other administrative purposes, each averaging some 10–30 square miles in a district covering 250–300 square miles.

Whatever the cause, Jat factionalism prevented any united response from the countryside. Ibbetson learned from oral tradition that the Baliyan and Salaklain (Des) Jats in the Doab across the Jumna joined the Dehias. Certainly in that area, protected against British military action by the river, Jat rebellion was a far more notable feature. Despite the extensive region held by the Jats west of the river, there was little in the way of a concerted rising, and the passage of military columns along the Grand Trunk Road inhibited all concentration.

But if Ibbetson was correct in asserting that the majority of the Jats in Karnal belonged to the Haulanias, and there is reason to assume this faction adopted at least a neutral attitude towards the British, the relative passivity of the Jats adjoining the Road is doubly explicable. Dehias were settled mainly in the Sonepat *tahsil* which was transferred to the Delhi district shortly before the outbreak in May 1857. The Dehias were easily the largest Jat *got* north of Delhi. In 1881 they were given as numbering 14,334 and 9,740 in Rohtak, compared with 4,434 Ghatwals in Delhi and 2,219 in Rohtak. Maconachie listed the villages according to their factional allegiance.

In such a situation the appeal to the clan or faction spirit depended on the emergence of a military leader who could often be something of an outsider. Across the Jumna in the Meerut district the Salaklain or Des Jats of the Baraut area rose up at the call of a so-called *badmash* (brigand), Shah Mal of Bijraul, while to the north in the Muzaffarnagar district, the call to arms came from

Khairati Khan, an old Pindari freebooter. Yet the most natural form of leadership was evidently a lineage head who had acquired recognition as raja. Now these were singularly lacking among the Jats. The Sikh rulers of Patiala, Nabha, and Jhind were the nearest equivalent. The only magnate commanding lineage loyalty was Rao Tula Ram, head of the Ahirs of Rewari, but the Ahirs were too small and peaceable a community in this region to act on a wider stage.

If rural discontent and turbulence was to be turned to the service of organized rebellion under the aegis of the Delhi regime, the only magnate group available to organize it were the group of Muslim *jagirdars* clustered to the west and south-west of Delhi, among whom the nawab of Jhajjar was the most substantial and prominent. The famous poet Ghalib noted that they were equal in number to the days of the week. None of them was deep-rooted. Jhajjar was founded no earlier than 1720 by nawab Nijabat Ali Khan of Pathan extraction. The Jhajjar nawab was afterwards tried by the British and hanged before the Red Fort on 23 December 1857. But there was little evidence to prove that he was more than an opportunist and equivocator, attempting to keep open his contacts both with the Delhi rebels and the British on the Ridge. His father-in-law, Abdus Samud Khan, fought on the rebel side at Badli-ki-Serai with some 300 Jhajjar troopers in the pay of the nawab, but since 70 Jhajjar troopers stationed at Karnal continued throughout to serve the British, it was evident that the nawab had little control over his forces. These consisted of the usual turbulent Rangar mercenaries who staged their own mutiny against their Hindu officers at Jhajjar and elsewhere.[49] Yet even had there been the character and will for formed rebellion, it was doubtful whether anything in the nature of a popular rising could have been mounted. The Jhajjar nawab was notorious for his revenue exactions. Succeeding to the gadi in 1845, it is said that he 'gave himself up for a time to gross debauchery, from the effects of which he never recovered'. But his natural taste and ability for monumental building and laying out pleasure gardens at least appear to have remained unimpaired. The result of his extravagance was that 'in revenue collections his little finger was thicker than his father's loins, and many villagers fled from under his oppressions'.[50] An autocrat of

[49] *Rohtak DG 1883–4*, pp. 29–31.
[50] *Idem*, p. 24.

this type could doubtless with more decision of character have raised up a substantial irregular force to aid the Delhi rebels, but he could rally no support based on lineage affiliation with the people over whom he ruled. Moreover, the usual opportunity for a revenue assignee to strengthen his position by establishing himself and kinsmen as local landholders was denied him. Fanshawe noted that 'the Nawabs were not lords of the soil', their tenures being 'in reality mere service *jagirs* of an unusually large extent. No doubt the rulers were absolute owners in estates which they had reclaimed from the waste and founded themselves, but the British grant in no way affected the status of the villagers of the estates then existing, who remained owners of the soil, as they had been for centuries before.'[51] One must question how far the British grant was the limiting influence in the matter, for landlord rights as such could not exist in a situation in which all cultivators paid equal revenue rates and the *bhaiachara* village tenure was so dominant. At all events, the nawabs were, therefore, forced to depend wholly on their revenue rights rather than the quasi-rental profits from landlord (*zamindari*) possession.

[51] *Idem*, p. 120.

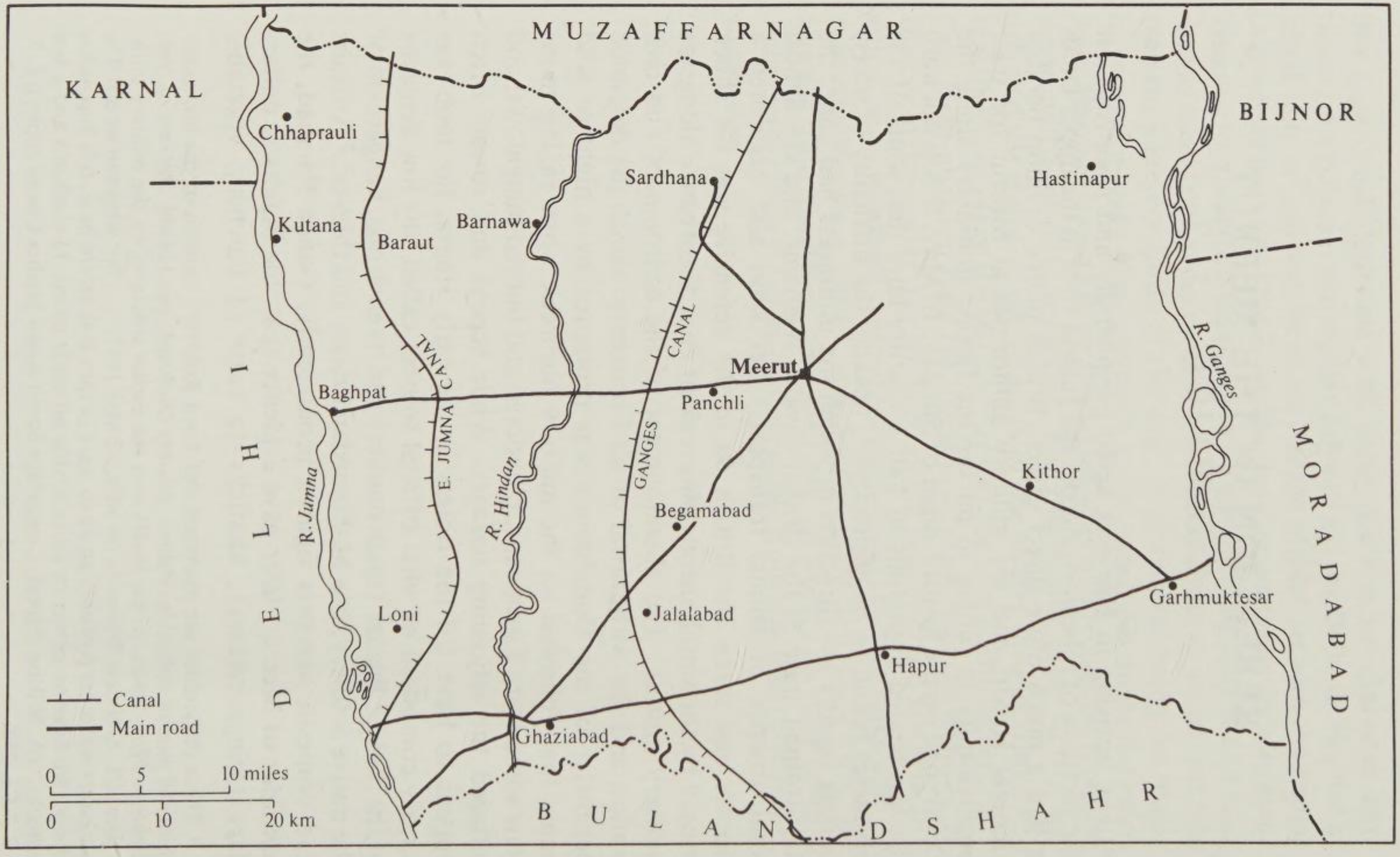
5

REBELLION IN THE MEERUT DISTRICT

Rural uprising in Haryana acted peripherally and negatively on the fortunes of rebellion. Across the Jumna river in the upper Doab it had a much more direct effect. British public opinion berated General Hewitt and the military authorities at Meerut for their pusillanimity in failing to pursue the fleeing mutineers along the Delhi road on the historic night of Sunday, 10 May. It was not until the less heated appraisals of half a century later that some of the obstacles began to be appreciated, notably the difficulty of ascertaining rapidly the direction in which the mutineers had gone, the half-trained state of the British cavalry regiment, and the almost total absence of animal transport.[1] Yet what also prevented a riposte and threw the British on to the defensive was the shock caused by the simultaneous outbreak of civil disturbance alongside military mutiny. The abandonment of the cantonment and civil station and the withdrawal of all Europeans within the defended perimeter of the Dumdumma was prompted by a night of wild panic that followed on the military outbreak when raging mobs slew some forty Europeans, plundered and burned bungalows, and pillaged the adjoining bazaars. While sepoys and *sowars* often appear to have led the rioters in the early stages, the mob was largely composed of what official sources called 'the low denizens of the Sudder Bazaar [main market] and its environs, hangers-on of the native soldiery, low Mahomedan rascals and thieves'.[2] Artisans and domestic servants figured prominently. Ganga Parshad, the *tahsildar* of Meerut, later gave evidence that 'the butchers, pullardars [fringe-makers], khaticks [a caste of butchers, vegetable

[1] These difficulties are discussed and Lord Roberts's opinion of the impracticability of pursuit upheld by Palmer, *Mutiny Outbreak*, pp. 114–14. *Per contra*, Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*, p. 65, reaffirmed the earlier strictures on the military authorities. Cf. Archdale Wilson to his wife, 12 May 1857: '. . . but what can we do? The mutineers will most probably go on to Agra or they may return here. It is impossible to say. We have no power to move having no cattle except 15 elephants and a few bullocks.' (A. Wilson Papers, Cambridge South Asian Studies Centre copies), f. 7.

[2] *NE* i. 252.



3. The Meerut District

sellers, weavers, and labourers], weavers, dureewallas [cotton carpet-makers], khansamas [cooks], khidmutgars [butlers], syces [grooms], and grass cutters were active in plundering, aided by people from the surrounding villages, as also, that the khaticks and pulladars murdered European men and women . . .'.[3] None of the 'respectable classes' participated; indeed, shopkeepers like Babu Kailash Chandar Ghosh, a Bengali, Sundur Das, and Eshur, a merchant from Patiala, were victims of the rioters' attentions. The cry of religion was raised at the outset. The first visible sign of disturbance for Ganga Parshad was when 'a 3rd Cavalry sowar with naked sword passed in full gallop towards the jail, crying out, "Brothers, Hindoos and Mussulmans, haste and join us, we are going to a religious war. Be assured we will not harm those who join us, but fight only against the Government".'[4] Yet the composition of the crowd, especially the prominence of traditionally Muslim weavers and textile workers, meant it rallied under the war cry of Islam. 'Din, din [the faith, the faith!], Yah! Ali! Ali!' resounded amid the noise of sackage and destruction throughout the night. To many British officials this seemed additional proof of the responsibility of Muslims for the outbreak.[5]

Urban riot was quickly suppressed the next day, but the shock waves of disturbance ran through the countryside. The communicators were the Gujars. Their villages ringed the city and cantonment, and they filled the ranks of the police. The supineness of the latter in the face of Gujar plundering argued collusion, a charge that was specifically directed against the Gujar chief police officer or *kotwal*, Dhanna Singh. Not only did the police prove totally ineffectual but on numerous occasions their blue uniforms were observed amongst the ranks of the rioters. Major G. W. Williams, who subsequently held an official inquiry into the conduct of the police, noted the speed with which the military disturbance was communicated to the civil population.

The astonishingly rapid rise of the Goojur population (a race of thieves by birth and profession) in consequence of the news of the revolt spread far and wide by the released convicts, and the prompt advantage they took of the outbreak to plunder and ill-treat all they came across is startling.[6]

[3] *Idem*, p. 308. Other sources speak also of *kunjras*, *chamars* (leatherworkers), *lodhas*, and *kumhars* (potters), as well as *chaprassies*; *idem*, pp. 342–3.

[4] *NE* i.

[5] Cf. Dunlop. *Service and Adventure*.

[6] Major G. W. Williams, *NE* i. 297.

The Gujars did not enter the station before 8 p.m. on the night of the mutiny, and probably, Williams surmised, not before 10 p.m. when all the mutinied soldiery had fled into the country or were on the road to Delhi. They 'crowded in thousands to attack those parts of the [civil] station which had hitherto been spared', including the lines of the Sappers and Miners and the Artillery.

The predatory action of the Gujars fitted in all too readily with the ethnic stereotypes which blinkered the British gaze. It was easy to dismiss the Gujars of the Meerut vicinity as the degenerate semi-urbanized off-scourings of a turbulent pastoral tribe who were notorious for 'grazing their own and stealing their neighbours' cattle, and leading the idle life they love'.[7] Like their brethren around Delhi they had adopted urban crime as a secondary occupation and found allied employment as watchmen and policemen.[8] As such they formed the natural carriers of violence to the countryside. Their action and that of other turbulent communities like the Muslim Rangars unsettled the entire upper Doab. Well to the south of Meerut in the parganas lining the Jumna river opposite Delhi, the Gujars of the Sikandarabad and Dadri area 'at once commenced plundering in all directions, burning *dak* (post) bungalows and destroying the telegraph'.[9]

In Dadri, where it was later said 'the Goojurs . . . were the worst rebels throughout the rebellion', there was even a small but direct link uniting mutiny with rural uprising. One of the fleeing *sowars* of the 3rd Light Cavalry, Bhagwan Sahai, a Gujar, at once returned to his village Burhpoora (modern Badhpura?) where his father Ayman Singh was *lambardar*, and with Bishun Singh, 'raised the whole of the Pergunnah on the Jumna'.[10] Away to the north in the shadow of the Siwalik outliers of the Himalayan range, the Gujars and Rangars of Saharanpur district rose almost as rapidly and within a week were threatening towns like Sirsawa, Deoband, and Saharanpur itself.[11] Gujar turbulence spilled over on to the far banks of the Jumna and Ganges, into the Ambala district (of the

[7] The phrase is stolen from Auckland Colvin, *Muzaffarnagar SR 1882*, p. 3.
[8] 'Gagoul', Sept. 1859.
[9] *NE* i. 226.
[10] Holograph note by C. Currie, 30 Aug. 1858, and note by J. C. Wilson, Bulandshahr Mutiny Basta, file No. 589, UP State Archives, Allahabad. List of persons eminent for disloyalty in Bulandshahr district, Commr. Meerut, Dept. XII, Special File 79/1858. Also statement of Munshi Lachmann Sarup, *FSUP* v. 44.
[11] *NE* i. 226, 467–9. Stokes, *Peasant and the Raj*, pp. 163 ff.

Punjab province), and into Bijnaur and Moradabad and Rohilkhand.

Indeed, it was a striking feature of the upper Doab that rural disturbance at first outpaced military mutiny. The only military force at Muzaffarnagar was a treasury guard of a subadar and thirty-five men of the 20th Native Infantry. In the confusion that followed the news of the Delhi disaster, this party made off with as much of the treasure as it could to Moradabad. The Magistrate was left with a personal guard of twelve men with muskets and bayonets and some seventy *thana* and *tahsili barkandanzes* (matchlockmen). In addition there appear to have been a body of district *sowars* which the *kotwal* employed to repress the villagers gathering to attack Muzaffarnagar city on 15 May. On 18 or 19 May, a party of 3rd LC arrived from Meerut, presumably the portion of 80–90 in the regiment who remained staunch. On 29 May these were relieved by Lt. Smith with a party of the 4th Irregular Cavalry. Even when, on 21 June, this force of Pathan horsemen mutinied and killed their officers, they were content to depart with a small amount of treasure. Daud Khan, the *duffadar* of *sowars*, was still able the next day to disperse the villagers gathering to sack the naked station. On 26 June a party of 3rd LC under Heliville Clarke came in and on 1 June the Nasirir battalion, some fifty of whom remained as a permanent garrison. Although Meerut did little to aid Muzaffarnagar, it is evident that its proximity helped to keep the gaol guarded, and district *sowars* staunch, even when organized military force momentarily failed the British. In Saharanpur the only regular forces at the time of the outbreak were a treasury guard of eighty-five men of the 29th Native Infantry regiment. These remained on duty until as late as 9 July when under cover of night they stole away to join the rebels in Delhi. Well before this time, Spankie, the Magistrate, had strengthened his sword arm. At the commencement he raised an additional 400 *barkandanzes* and *sowars* to reinforce the sub-police stations of the various *tahsils*, the *kotwali* of Saharanpur itself, and to provide the district office with a hundred of these men. On 19 May, with disturbances coming increasingly close to the Sadr station and the Muslim population of the city growing restive, he asked for aid from Barnes, the Commissioner of Ambala, who responded by sending a party of the 4th Light Cavalry under Captain Wyld and a company of the 5th Native Infantry, under Captain Garstin. Garstin's men, on arrival in Saharanpur district

from across the Jumna, quickly proved refractory, and on 3 June, some seventeen of them broke into mutiny and made off. H. D. Robertson commented appositely: 'In our position they were actually reinforcements. We were playing a game of brag; the holder of the worst hand might yet be the winner. A chance existed of the native troops holding out long enough to subdue the rebellious villages, which would otherwise swamp us.'[12]

The tendency of rural violence to outpace the progress of mutiny among the security forces reflected the particular conditions of the upper Doab. The dominance of peasant communities and the marked absence of substantial rural magnate elements gave free rein to violence, denied the British the help of powerful collaborators, and yet also prevented the emergence of powerful enemies who could weld village disturbance into a wider form of opposition. Although the almost instantaneous and widely scattered Gujar uprisings broke the crust of order throughout the upper Doab, R. H. Dunlop, the Magistrate of Meerut, dismissed them in retrospect as the expression of a free-floating turbulence that lacked all political direction. The Gujars 'had no ill will against the English Government', he wrote in his book published in 1859.[13] Rebellion was not the work of the people but of a small group of Muslim conspirators who cleverly exploited such naturally turbulent elements, notably 'the sepoys, the armed budmashes of the towns, the predatory tribes and many of the Mussulmans'. Yet when proposing the formation of the Meerut Volunteers at the end of June 1857, Dunlop spoke freely of the Gujars throughout the district as in a state of 'open rebellion'.[14] Such ambiguity requires closer scrutiny.

Of the quarter of a million Gujars dwelling in the North-Western Provinces and congregated largely in the grazing lands of the Ganges, Jumna, and Hindan riverain tracts of the upper Doab, some 60,000 were to be found in the Meerut district.[15] They bunched heavily in the Baghpat and Loni parganas on the west and the Hastinapur and Kithor parganas on the east, abutting the Jumna and Ganges respectively. But even in the central or *huzur* pargana of Meerut they numbered 10,000, and despite the heavy confiscations

[12] H. D. Robertson, *District Duties during the Revolt in the North-West Provinces of India in 1857* (London, 1859), p. 37.

[13] Dunlop, *Service and Adventure*, pp. 39–40, 152–5.

[14] PP 1857–8, xliv, pt. iv, p. 1081; Dunlop, *Service and Adventure*, p. 57.

[15] *Census of the NW Provinces, 1865*. E. C. Buck to C. A. Elliott, 17 Mar. 1874, p. 6, in *Meerut SR 1874*.

after the Mutiny they continued to hold some thirty-one villages in full *zamindari* possession within a few miles of the city and cantonment. The early history of this tribal caste is obscure. They boasted a western or 'Punjabi' origin and authorities, such as H. M. Elliot, gave credence to the claim that they were of 'impure' Rajput stock.[16] The stereotype of them was as lowly graziers. But already in the *Ain-i-Akbari* of 1596 they were recorded as an important land-controlling element in the upper Doab, particularly in northern Mathura, Palwal, Sikandarabad, Loni, Dasna, and in western Muzaffarnagar.[17] In the second half of the eighteenth century they had taken advantage of the unsettled times to win for themselves an extensive local dominion. The Gujar chief Rao Jit Singh had 'found the occupation of a leader of banditti more profitable than his hereditary calling of grazier and cattle-lifter, and more to his taste than cultivating the soil for crops which the Sikh, Mahratta, or Imperialist raider had quite as good a chance of reaping'. While to the south-east the Jat leader of Kuchesar, Magni Ram, established control over the parganas of Puth, Sayana, and Farida, Jit Singh set himself up in the eastern parganas of what became the Meerut district. Subsequently his nephew and successor, Nain Singh, obtained from Perron, the French Maratha governor of Aligarh, over 300 villages in *jagir*. Gujar power centred itself east of Meerut city at Parikshitgarh and subsequently Bahsuma, with a solid block of territory which in 1814 measured twenty miles from east to west and forty miles from north to south and comprised 349 villages on a fixed revenue of Rs. 49,000. On Nain Singh's death in 1818, the Gujar lordship was brought crashing down, the British resuming all but thirty-five villages. On the failure in 1836 of those male heirs which survived from the wreck, some twenty-five villages or so passed by marriage into the Gujar house of Landhaura in Saharanpur district.[18]

The blows of outrageous fortune must have been still harder to bear in the face of the success of neighbouring magnates like the Jat 'raja' of Kuchesar or the Afghan Abdul Latif Khan of Khanpur (Bulandshahr district), who managed to consolidate their hold and get their 'estates' recognized by the British as belonging to them in

16 Elliot, *Memoirs*, i. 99–100; Atkinson, *Gaz.* ii. 184–6.

17 Elliot, *Memoirs*, ii. map facing p. 202.

18 Atkinson, *Gaz.* iii, pt. i, pp. 290–2. Also draft portion of an early gazetteer (*c.*1820) superinscribed 'For Glossary Extracts' in H. M. Elliot MS, Royal Asiatic Society, London.

full *zamindari* right. Gujar political decline was doubtless accompanied by relative economic decline. Despite their control over extensive tracts of arable land, the Gujars continued to derive much of their livelihood from cattle-keeping and cattle-trading. Traditionally they had found these activities more paying than agriculture. In 1826 across the Jumna in Palwal pargana below Delhi, R. C. Cavendish noted the conjunction of predilection and profit:

> . . . the Goojurs and Rangurs, particularly of this Pergunnah, keep many buffaloes and cows, will not exert themselves in the culture of land and prefer the easy life of keeping herds of cattle to the hard work at the plough. They consider the former a more certain livelihood, for should the rains fail in our pergunnah they remove to the lowlands on the banks of the Jumna.[19]

In the Doab, cattle-stealing remained an important activity. Two months before the Mutiny outbreak, John Strachey, then the young Magistrate of Moradabad, reported on the serious extent of cattle-thieving among even the more substantial Gujar communities living in or near the Ganges *khadir*. Probably seventy-five out of a hundred able-bodied Gujars were thieves, he believed.

> This is true not only of the poor and least influential members of the class. The zemindars who possess the largest share of wealth and whose position gives them the greatest influence are almost all receivers of stolen cattle and the inciters of the thefts that are committed.

A regular system of correspondence existed between the Gujars of different parts of the country. Stolen cattle were quickly passed on to friends in another district and other stolen cattle received in exchange. 'It is said that the Goojurs of the khadir of the Ganges are in frequent communication with those on the banks of the Jumna.'[20] The profits earned from cattle-rearing retained their importance in the economy of Gujar communities. The middle and upper Doab traditionally imported its plough and draught cattle from the sturdier breeds raised in Haryana. As cultivation expanded and grazing grounds contracted, the demand quickened. The Jhajjar nawab established a cattle fair at Beri (later Rohtak district)

[19] R. C. Cavendish, Report on Pergunnah Palwal, 4 Dec. 1826, Board's Collns. 1215/30956, ff. 1755, 1960.

[20] J. Strachey, Report on the plans adopted . . . in suppression of . . . cattle-stealing in Moradabad, 28 Mar. 1857, *Sels. Recs. Govt. NWP*, pt. xxxiii, art. iii, pp. 27–9 (Allahabad, 1860).

which was subsequently moved to Jahazgarh. By 1895 some 50,000 cattle were sold in the spring and autumn sales, a half of these going to the four Doab districts of Aligarh, Bulandshahr, Meerut, and Muzaffarnagar. Also the Bhiwani autumn fair dispatched some 10,000 animals to the upper Doab. This was some forty years after the opening of the Ganges Canal and after very considerable expansion of cultivation and population. But the practice of *beoparis* (travelling merchants) and *banjaras* (pack bullock men) buying up one- and two-year-old animals and disposing of them in areas where jungle was to be found for rearing was undoubtedly an old one. Certainly the Gujars must have been the main suppliers of cattle.[21]

Yet whatever the remuneration from pastoralism, it could not bear comparison with the profitability of canal-irrigated farming. Where the opportunity afforded, the Gujar was prepared to abandon his old life-style and imitate the Jat. When Thomason, the Lieutenant-Governor, made a journey along the length of the East Jumna Canal in 1848 (the old Mughal water-course that had been reopened in 1830) he was struck by the manner in which the Gujars and Rangars had been 'greatly redeemed from their idle and predatory habits and are fast becoming peaceful and thrifty cultivators'.[22] The main Ganges Canal was not opened until 1854 and even then provided only a fitful water supply until changes were made in the early 1860s. Its course traced a majestic arc through the western part of the Meerut pargana, where already irrigation from wells had raised agriculture to the highest level. The contrast between the richness and prosperity of the portion of the district west of the Meerut–Delhi road (broken only by the Hindan ravine tract) and dry and sandy eastern parganas must have been marked in 1857. In 1835, Elliot observed that in what was to become the *tahsils* of Hastinapur and Kithor 'the soil with few exceptions . . . is not rich and the friable nature of it renders the digging of wells a difficult and unsatisfactory undertaking'.[23] It was only in 1860, after the

[21] Vet. Capt. H. T. Pease, 'The Cattle of Harriana and Sirsa', *The Agricultural Ledger* (Calcutta, 1895), No. 22; H. C. R. Hailey, *U.P. Cattle Census of 1915*, pp. 4–5; E. W. Oliver and C. W. Wilson, *Breeds of Indian Cattle: Notes on the Indigenous Cattle of the U.P.* (Allahabad, 1911).

[22] J. Thomason, Minute on East Jumna Canal, Mar. 1848, *Sels. Recs. Govt. NWP: Mr Thomason's Despatches*, i. 390. Cf. 'Canals of Irrigation in the N.W. Provinces', *Calcutta Review*, xii (1849), p. 125.

[23] H. M. Elliot, *Reps. Rev. Settle. NWP* i. 203.

great upheaval, that the opening of the Anupshahr distributary revolutionized these thirsty tracts and turned them later into one of the main sugar-growing regions of the upper Doab.

Although there was little marked shift in the distribution of land among the proprietary castes in the pre-Mutiny period, the exception was 'the neighbourhood of the cities of Delhi and Meerut where the mahajuns and tradespeople have invested their capital in land'.[24] Already in 1837, Elliot noted how the machinations of subordinate government and court officials had brought about changes in ownership in the central or *huzur* pargana around Meerut city.[25]

The disturbance of land titles appears to have reached out eastwards. In 1844, W. C. Plowden reported on the numerous complaints he had received on tour about fraudulent actions in the Law Courts:

> . . . the evils inflicted by some of these courts are becoming intolerable to the people, and are producing the usual results in driving them to crime to revenge injuries for which they can get no redress. It is notorious that a clique exists in this District, who by the influence of their ill-gotten wealth, the aid of certain unscrupulous wakeels [lawyers], the connivance of the Courts' Omlah [officials] and the laxity of the Native Judge, have organised a system by which they can acquire any property they may covet, and ruin any one who is obnoxious to them. The complaints of the people of the systematic and successful prosecution of false suits and the consequent insecurity of property was openly and unanimously expressed during my tour, particularly in the tracts under the jurisdiction of Meerut, Haupper (Hapur) and Mowannah or Khutowlee [Khatauli] parties were pointed out to me who had lost their property without ever knowing it was endangered.[26]

Significantly these complaints came from a relatively backward part of the Meerut district and indicated the absence of large semi-tribal blocs of cultivating peasant proprietors, such as characterized the rich Jat area to the west between the Hindan and the Jumna. Already in 1836, Elliot remarked on the high proportion of single landlord (*zamindari khali*) tenures in the area around Meerut itself.[27] Yet the *zamindari* tenure was not always a sign that land

[24] *Meerut SR 1874.*

[25] Report on Pargana Meerut, 6 July 1837, *Reps. Rev. Settl. NWP* i. 222.

[26] Adm. Rep. Collr. Meerut for 1843–4, para. 6; H. M. Elliot, Colln. MSS Eur. D. 316, f. 273.

[27] H. M. Elliot, Report on Pargana Meerut, *Reps. Rev. Settl. NWP* i. 222. Also Elliot, Settlement Book, MSS Eur. F 56, f. 68.

control rights had passed out of the hands of village proprietors. Gujars notoriously preferred to live off rental profits under joint undivided ownership (*zamindari mushtarka*) rather than partition their lands on *pattidar* holdings for the purpose of taking up cultivation themselves.[28] Yet less well-to-do Gujars appear to have been forced by economic pressure and proprietary loss into the ranks of cultivators, and in many instances were to be found working land belonging to men of another caste. Despite the history of Gujar overlordship in the eastern parganas, it did not mean that Gujars held the bulk of villages either in proprietary or even cultivating possession. In the mid-1830s Elliot recorded that Gujars were proprietors of only one-quarter of the villages of Hastinapur, a fifth in Kithor, and three-fifths in Tappa Gora. Originally the Tagas (or Tyagis, an 'impure' agricultural Brahmin caste equivalent to the Bhumihar (Bhuinhar) in the eastern districts) had held 84 villages, of which they retained half in 1835.[29] In parganas like Kithor, the Jats had also gained a strong footing. Here by the 1860s 'the landless cultivators' were 'chiefly Gujars, attracted by the pasturage lands of the *khadir*, which form the best pig preserves in the district'.[30]

Ancient enmities springing from the historical struggle for land control still burned under the surface. In the early nineteenth century, the British had found the pacification of the district a slow business, one obstacle being 'the hereditary feuds between the Jaut and Goojur castes of cultivators, who like other tribes in a similar stage of civilization consider themselves pledged to support individuals of their own fraternity, right or wrong, by perjury, rapine and murder'.[31] Enmity was three-cornered because of the way in which the Tyagis, the original possessors of the soil, had been pushed back:

> The traditions of all tribes declare them to be the degenerate descendants of a Brahman stock, who were in possession of the district as cultivators long before the arrival of the Jats from the west. Retreating before the Jats and Gujars, the Tagas abandoned the north-western parganahs where those

[28] H. M. Elliot, Report on Meerut District, 31 Aug. 1836, *Reps. Rev. Settl. NWP* i. 190.

[29] H. M. Elliot, 'Revenue Papers', f. 381, 673, MSS Eur. F 60. *Reps. Rev. Settl. NWP* i. 206.

[30] Atkinson, *Gaz.* iii. (1), 396.

[31] From draft portion of an early gazetteer (*c.*1820?) superinscribed 'For Glossary Extracts' in H. M. Elliot MSS, Royal Asiatic Society, London.

warlike tribes first settled, and are now chiefly found in the parganahs to the south of the district.[32]

In the interval between the first outbreak of mutiny at Meerut on 10 May and the general spread of mutiny to other stations from 20 May, Gujar violence appeared as the most serious threat to British control of the countryside. That threat was most acute in Bulandshahr district to the south, where Sikandarabad came under attack on 12 May, and on 21 May, after the troops from the 9th NI defected, Bulandshahr itself was stormed by a huge swarm of Gujars. The extension of Gujar action appears, however, to have owed a good deal to the arrival of the magnate leader, nawab Walidad Khan, from rebel-held Delhi.

At Meerut there was no further attempt at mass pillage after the night of 10 May; the presence of British troops and of 'loyal' elements of the mutinied regiments acted as a sufficient deterrent. Yet it was not until a fortnight after the outbreak that troops were used to restore authority beyond the city and cantonment limits.

Their immediate task was to wreak punishment on the nearby Gujar villages from which the pillage of Meerut had been conducted and which continued to prey upon travellers and stop up the roads to all but armed parties. On 24 May, Johnston, the Magistrate, rode out with a small force of European cavalrymen (of the Carabiniers or 6th Dragoon Guards) to the 'Gujar' village of Ikhtiyarpur 'which had become notorious for stopping daks [post deliveries] and other acts of rebellion'.[33] On the 3 June it was the turn of Nurnagar, Lisaree, and Gagaul, a line of Gujar villages running immediately south of the city from three to six miles distant. They had been foremost in the work of plundering, and in stopping the road to Bulandshahr and Agra. Gagaul, according to Dunlop, was forewarned by the Meerut *kotwal*, Rao Kishen Singh, a relative of the celebrated Ahir chief of Rewari, Rao Tula Ram. Consequently the troops found it empty and burned it in vengeance, while the *kotwal* absconded.[34]

The pattern of local violence was inevitably shaped by events at a higher level. By the last week of May the military authorities in

[32] Atkinson, *Gaz.* iii (1), 264.
[33] *NE* i. 258.
[34] Dunlop, *Service and Adventure*, pp. 47–8.

Meerut had recovered sufficient nerve and organization to dispatch a column under General Wilson to the Hindan river near Ghaziabad. Here on 30 and 31 May, it succeeded in repulsing the sepoy army sent out from Delhi. Yet neither of these victories nor the important action on 8 June at Badli-ki-Serai, on the Grand Trunk Road north of Delhi, were sufficient to contain the limits of rebellion, for everywhere down the Doab and across the Ganges into Rohilkhand the sepoy regiments were mutinying. Indeed the decision to concentrate the entire British military effort on the recovery of Delhi from the position occupied on the Ridge on 9 June had the effect of stripping the districts of their means of quelling and overawing local disturbance. Immediately after its victories on the Hindan, Wilson's column was summoned to join the Delhi Field Force, as was the Sirmur battalion of Gurkhas which had come down from Dehra Dun by canal boat and for a critical week from 24 to 30 May recovered Bulandshahr from Gujar hands. On their departure, the British hold in Bulandshahr district quickly collapsed, the British officials having finally to abandon the district station on 11 June to the hostile power of Walidad Khan. From his mud fort at Malagarh, some five miles to the north Walidad at once utilized local Gujar allies, particularly those of the Nadwasia *got* under Ayman Singh of the Agauta pargana, to push up northwards towards Hapur on the Meerut road. The threat to the valuable government horse-stud at Babugarh, near Hapur, prompted the dispatch from Meerut of 120 European riflemen and cavalry with a couple of horse artillery guns, against which Walidad's levies proved no match in the fight at Gulaothi on 18 June. Yet a few days later the Meerut military authorities decided to hold back from attempting to contest the advance of the large Bareilly brigade of mutineers under Bakht Khan, which began crossing the Ganges at Garmukhtesar on 21 June, and at length on 27 June set out unopposed for Delhi, destroying the Babugarh stud establishment *en passant*.

Such a public acknowledgement of weakness gave the signal for the transformation of rural disturbance into open rebellion. That at least was the interpretation which was employed by R. H. Dunlop, the Magistrate (since 12 June), to persuade General Hewitt to allow a force of volunteer horsemen to be raised from a nucleus of twenty-five or so unemployed Europeans cooped up in the Dumdumma. Disturbance had not only turned into rebellion but had

divided the civil population into hostiles and friendlies on caste lines:

> The Goojurs throughout the district are in open rebellion, and either with or without his consent have elected Kuddum Singh, of Pureechutghur, Rajah of the Eastern Pergunnah of Meerut; the police have been driven out of Pureechutguhr, and report that Kuddum Singh has mounted three guns on the fort . . . In furtherance of the plan of establishing a Goojur government, the Gujars of Booklana, Himmutpore, and a number of Goojur villages in the neighbourhood of Pureechutguhr have attacked and plundered the well-affected Jat villages, burning the houses and butchering without mercy the inhabitants. Kuddum Singh can command 2,000 men.
>
> The zemindar of Bignour [Bijraul], Shah Mull, alias Maho Singh, having plundered the town and tehseel of Barode [Baraut], the bazaar at Bhaghut [Baghpat], and broken the bridge [of boats across the Jumna], has now at his command some 5,000 ruffians, nearly all Goojurs, of whom the most dangerous are 200 escaped prisoners of the Meerut jail.
>
> . . . The Goojurs, accustomed many of them to a life of robbery and danger, and assembling in thousands under regular leaders, who act without scruple in defiance of Government, are more than a match for our Jat friends, scattered over a large territory and without recognised chiefs. The Jats have almost invariably behaved nobly in the support of law and order . . . The Rajpoots of Deolah, also under Nawal Singh, are most anxious to be organized for the Government service . . . It will be the duty of the Meerut Volunteer Horse to raise the friends of Government throughout the district, to assist and encourage them in fighting our sworn enemies, the rebel Goojurs, and in punishing such villages and bands of dacoits as can be disposed of without regular troops. . . . In consequence of the district being at present left totally unprotected, it has become almost entirely disorganized, wholesale butcheries and plunderings are prevalent throughout it, and unless some vigorous measures are taken to assist our friends and punish our foes, we shall be totally deserted by the mass of the people; those still faithful to us are becoming disgusted at our apparent apathy, and mutiny and rebellion of today may become a revolution.[35]

This analysis was founded on partial experience and, as Dunlop was to discover to his personal cost, on a well-nigh fatal reliance on ethnic sterotypes. For the moment, however, it served to provide a programme of action for the British in the immediate neighbourhood of Meerut. The tide of mutiny and revolt in early June had rolled up the whole fabric of British control in the North-Western

[35] Dunlop; Magistrate of Meerut to Gen. Hewitt, 28 June 1857, PP xliv, pt. 4, 1081–2. Village names are given more correctly in *Service and Adventure*, p. 57.

Provinces apart from the upper Doab above Meerut. The survival of this small area depended on its contiguity with the Punjab districts across the Jumna. Meerut's direct contact with political *terra firma* and the Delhi Field Force was thus westwards along the road that crossed the bridge of boats at Baghpat. The first task of the Meerut Volunteer Horse or Khaki Risala was to sally forth on 4 July against the Gujar villages of Panchli, Ghat, and Jamalpur, where 'immediately after the outbreak the Gujar inhabitants completely closed the road'. Again the distance was only some six miles from Meerut. The villages were surrounded and assaulted just after daybreak by parties of a force 300 strong, two-thirds of which comprised regular European troops; of the villagers, 'a considerable number of the men were killed, 46 taken prisoner, 40 of whom were subsequently hung, a large quantity of cattle carried off, and the villages burnt, women and children alone were left unmolested'. The effect of this draconian action was such that the Gujar 'raja', Qadam (Kuddam) Singh, was said to have quit his fort at Parikshitgarh and retired to Bahsuma, while his men dispersed.[36]

The other line of British action was to assist the Jats. Although the British had withdrawn their detachments from the Hapur–Galaothi region on the approach of the Bareilly Brigade, news was received that on 6 July the Jats of Bhutona had repelled the forces of Walidad Khan, killed one of his 'generals', Ismail Khan, and taken three guns. 'These gallant Jats stood out for themselves and for government throughout the rebellion, and thenceforth particular care was taken to support them and render them assistance when seriously threatened.' Information that the Gujars of Sikri were planning an attack on the rich Jat village of Begamabad nearer at hand some fourteen miles along the Delhi road brought out the Khakis on 9 July, this time without the support of regular troops. They proved too late to save Begamabad from destruction but they wreaked a savage vengeance on Sikri. This village of Sikri Khurd, standing just east of the Meerut–Delhi road, a mile and a half from Begamabad, was said to have taken 'an active part from the very commencement . . . in the dacoitees and disgraceful butcheries for which their tribe had become notorious' and was 'the headquaters of the plundering men of the [Gujar] tribe'.

[36] *NE* i. 263. NWP Rev. Progs., Sept. 1859, No. 311. Meerut Confiscations Statement (Range 221/30).

A number of Jats commenced collecting at the important village and bazaar of Begumabad, for the purpose of defending themselves against the three Goojur villages of Sekree, Nugla [Nagla Bir] and Deosa [Deosa Banjarpur]; but this was met by a counter-collection of Goojurs, not only of these three villages but of others in the neighbourhood. The Goojurs very rapidly outnumbered the Jats, being better armed, less divided among themselves, and more habituated to acts of violence.[37]

Gujar resistance was fierce and was overcome only after a five-hour engagement and the employment of a small howitzer to blow open the gateway of the strongpoint. The death toll exacted by the Khakis was around 170, 'among them some mutineer troopers and sipahees, one of the former particularly made a desperate resistance'. 'The Jats who followed', we are told, 'had been so cowed by their losses of the previous day, that they were useless except for plunder; hundreds of them flying from any house containing Goojurs.'

The simplistic notion of caste conflict gains some justification as an explanation of inter-village warfare where caste differences were reinforced by ecology. To the immediate south of Meerut, nature had tended to separate the arable from the more pastorally oriented communities. The whole area lay in the 'central depression', formed on the west by the Hindan 'cliff' and demarcated somewhat indefinitely on the east by the broad sand ridge that starting east of Sardhana swept round north and east of Meerut cantonment and then ran roughly south as far as the vicinity of Sarawa. The drainage problems of the area east of the Meerut–Delhi road were later to be multiplied by the action of the Ganges Canal and its distributaries in raising the water table, and on the Survey of India maps of the early twentieth century a substantial portion is represented as grassland and scrub outside the yellow-marked and cultivated area. All the poor Gujar villages in this tract participated in revolt—Deosa, Nagla Bir, Sikri Khurd, Muradabad, Churyala, and Gagaul. In contrast, the Jat villages immediately to the west stood in splendidly fertile land, as Elliot had observed in the 1830s.[38]

[37] R. H. Dunlop to Mag., Meerut, 11 July 1857, PP 1857–8, xliv, pt. 4, p. 1071; Meerut Confiscations Statement, loc. cit., entry 133; *NE* i. 264. Cf. Dunlop, *Service and Adventure*, pp. 70–5. There was a British troop encampment site near Begamabad from pre-Mutiny times. NWP Rev. Progs., Sept. 1854, No. 315 (P/220/40).

[38] H. M. Elliot, 'Revenue Papers', MSS Eur. F 60, f. 373. On the 'Central Depression', cf. *Handbook of Tahsil Ghaziabad* (*c.*1900?), p. 7, in Bd. of Rev. Library, Lucknow.

After these actions the British were able to venture farther afield and reassert a measure of administrative control. They put to use the services of the flamboyant and eccentric Judge of Moradabad, J. Cracroft Wilson, who on being forced to quit his post had kept some thirty fierce Rohilla Pathan troopers of the 8th Irregular Cavalry attached to his person. With these he began collecting the land revenue instalments in the Meerut pargana. It was indicative of the effects of British punitive measures that he was able, on 20 July, with the assistance of only a few revenue peons, to seek out and punish the murderers of a Brahmin in the Gujar village of Shaulda, fourteen miles along the Meerut–Garmukhtesar road. Wilson ordered the bodies of the four alleged culprits to be left hanging rather than taken down for cremation according to due Hindu rites 'as a warning to the fraternity'. When a thousand Gujars, relatives of the deceased, 'gathered to eat the funeral feast and called for the order to be defied', the Shaulda Gujars refused, fearing Wilson's retribution. 'The melancholy meal was eaten with the bodies hanging before their eyes—a solemn warning that British rule was not yet at an end.'[39]

Gujar resistance had not been broken but had shifted its ground. Spreadeagled over a broad area within easy reach of Meerut, the Gujar villages were too easily crushed by surprise punitive raids before they could concert their power. Qadam Singh had made the obvious move in retiring to the Ganges *khadir* where the broken country made pursuit difficult. Later in drawing up his indictment in the Meerut confiscation statement, Drand Sapte, the Magistrate, alleged that after Qadam Singh had set himself up as raja of Parikshitgarh and Mawana, his brethren, Prithi Singh, Dullel Singh, Man Singh, and Dabee Singh, had 'collected immense bodies of men with which they attacked villages not only in this District but in Moozuffurnuggur and Bijnour. Had these men remained quiet all this part of the country would not have been affected by the disturbances but they raised the Goojurs of this and the neighbouring Districts.' After the British recaptured Delhi in September 1857 and reoccupied the upper Doab in strength, Qadam Singh 'and his immediate followers and nearly the whole Goojur population of Mawannah, Purreechtgurh and the Ganges Khadir went to swell

[39] Report of J. C. Wilson, *NE* i. 418. Wilson's flamboyance probably extended to his estimates of numbers.

the Rohilkhand rebel force, that with their assistance, for months desolated Bijnour district'.[40]

Doubtless there was exaggeration and undue simplification in these charges. Just as it is evident that so-called Gujar villages were far from always being single-caste dominated, or Gujar political action far from purely tribal in character, not all Gujars adopted the same political stance. By August 1857 the Gujars had found themselves pushed aside in the larger organization of rebellion, so that some were found ready to give aid on occasion to the British authorities. When on 22 August the *tahsildar* of Hapur found himself under attack during his revenue collections at the village of Datiana (some five miles south of Kithor and eight miles north-east of Babugarh), he was able to defend the treasure from Walidad Khan's troopers with the aid of some 1,500 Gujars. Local rivalries could well have played a part, for nearby Gujar villages on the south—Sikhera, Rajpur, Todurpur—joined Zabardast Khan, Walidad's local ally, in the attack on Datiana.[41] Zabardast Khan appears to have been a Muslim Tyagi who held a share to the *zamindari* title to the *mauza* of Hapur. Whether it was Islam that carried him on to Walidad's side or more plausibly rivalry with the other part-owner of Hapur, Bhup Singh, a Hindu Tyagi, must remain a matter for speculation. The Tyagis were solidly established as cultivating communities in Hapur pargana, in Elliot's time, holding forty-two villages to the twenty-one held by the Jats.[42] Bhup Singh threw in his lot with the British, showing 'conspicuous loyalty from the commencement of the disturbances' and through his influence aiding materially in the collection of revenue from the Tyagi proprietors of the pargana.[43]

Local internal caste factionalism did much to neutralize opposition even in areas at a distance from Meerut, beyond the immediate range of British retributive power.

Having repressed Gujar turbulence in the immediate vicinity of Meerut by the small expeditions against Panchli on 4 July and Sikri

[40] Meerut Confiscation Statement, entries 139–42, Purreechutgurh, NWP Rev. Progs., Sept. 1859, No. 311 (Range 221/30).

[41] Meerut Confiscation Statement, Nos. 185–8.

[42] H. M. Elliot, 'Revenue Papers', MSS Eur. F 60/B, f. 383. On *zamindari* rights in Hapur, Dunlop to F. Williams, 16 Aug. 1857, NWP Pol. Progs., 29 Nov. 1858, No. 131 (Range 230/83).

[43] Meerut Div. Statement of Proposed Rewards, 20 Nov. 1858, NWP Pol. Progs., Jan. 1859, No. 255 (P/230/86). Referred to here as 'Roop Ram'.

Khurd on 9 July, the British turned to secure their westward communication with the Delhi Field Force. Here the critical point was the Jumna crossing at Baghpat, spanned—as it still is today—by a bridge of boats. On pushing down the Grand Trunk Road from Ambala, General Barnard had detached a regiment belonging to the collaborating Jhind raja to guard this key point on the flank of his long line of communication. On 20 June the bridge of boats was attacked and burned by 'some 3 or 4,000 Goojurs strengthened by a couple of hundred of the Jullunder Mutineers and some 25 Troopers'. Three days later, the Jhind soldiers were able to repair the bridge, and for its better security occupied the east bank of the Jumna, but on 27 June a considerable force of mutineers (said to be composed of an infantry regiment, 400 cavalry, and 2 guns accompanied by 300 or 400 Gujars) appeared up the east bank from Delhi. On their approach the Jhind force hastily retreated back across the Jumna and cut away the bridge of boats behind them. The mutineers made no attempt to follow across the swollen river but at once made their way back to Delhi, taking with them the *thanadar* (police officer) and *matsadi* (accountant) 'as they had been supplying provisions to the English'.[44]

Responsibility for the Gujar depredations at Baghpat was ascribed by the Meerut authorities to the leadership of 'Shah Mull, alias Maho Singh'. When Dunlop addressed General Hewitt on 28 June 1857 so fixed was his stereotype of differential caste response, and of the inherent loyalty of the sturdy Jat cultivating communities, that he ignored the significance of the fact that Shah Mal was a Jat belonging to the small Mawi *got* and a village *zamindar* of Bijraul in the rich cornland east of Baraut. Greathed, the chief political officer with the Delhi Field Force, spoke of him as 'an insurgé when the country belonged to the Begum Sumroo, [who] had not forgotten his old tricks, and though advanced in years, became at once the acknowledged leader of the disaffected'. It was easy to interpret his motives as purely those of rapine. The official narrative describes him as 'a man of previous bad character' who 'at this time commenced his career by seizing 500 head of laden cattle, travelling with merchandize through the country, and proceeded to collect escaped convicts, and the worst of his own

[44] C. B. Saunders, 24 June 1857, MSS Eur. C 94, f. 10; *PGR Mutiny Corresp.* vii, pt. 1, pp. 157, 171–3; Jiwan Lal in *TNN*, pp. 127, 129; J. S. Campbell, 6 June 1859, NWP Pol. Progs., 7 July 1859, No. 63 (P/230/89); Greathed, *Letters*, pp. 58–63, 76–7.

brotherhood, to form a gang for more daring exploits'.[45] Shah Mal went on to attack the government offices (*tahsili*) at Baraut and plunder the bazaar before moving on to Baghpat to do likewise.

Collaboration between rural insurgents and the Delhi mutineers presented the Meerut authorities with an important local danger; more serious for the wider struggle was the assistance the country was giving to the city. When the Khaki Risala rode off on 16 July they were said to be 'going in the Baghput direction to prevent Shamah from sending supplies to the King of Delhi'.[46] How extensive this provisioning of rebel Delhi had become was shortly to be discovered. Dunlop's ingenious classification of political affiliation according to caste category received a sharp jolt. When Shah Mal had opened his career of defiance and attacked the *tahsili* at Baraut, the *tahsildar* Karam Ali Khan, a native of Rohtak, was helped in carrying off the treasure to safety by Nawal Singh, a leading Rajput of the village of Deola, sited where the East Jumna Canal crossed the Meerut–Baghpat road. The Rajputs of Deola had also helped to protect the nearby canal station from destruction, and when the Khaki Risala reached the ford over the Hindan, it was Nawal Singh who on 16 July guided them across. On arrival, therefore, it was not surprising that Dunlop should find Deola being threatened with an attack by Shah Mal from the village of Basaund, lying some two miles to the north. This, however, was a Muslim Tyagi village. It paid dearly for harbouring Shah Mal, who withdrew. All 180 adult males caught by the British in the village were mercilessly shot down or put to the sword. 'A severe example was essential, and the slightest mawkish pusillanimity in such a case would have spread the flame of revolt throughout the district.'[47] In Basaund Dunlop found an estimated 8,000 maunds of grain, dal, etc. in store—clear proof it seemed of supplies being collected for Delhi. The advance next day along the line of the East Jumna Canal to Baraut provided the real surprise. The route ran into the heart of the Chaurasi Des (homeland of the notional eighty-four villages) belonging to the Salaklain *got* of the Jats. So confident was Dunlop that he went off on his own, with only the *tahsildar* and two *sowars*, to take into custody the village *lambardars* along

[45] Greathed, *Letters*, p. 137; *NE* i. 258.

[46] Mrs Saunders to C. B. Saunders, 21 July 1857, MSS Eur. C 94, f. 36.

[47] Dunlop, *Service and Adventure*, p. 94. On Nawal Singh and the Deola Rajputs, see pp. 46, 87 ff.

the line of march, this being his means of realizing the land revenue. On reaching the 'friendly village' of Barka, they were warned to fly, 'as the whole of the Chourassee Des were being raised by Shah Mull for an attack on us; directly after, a large crowd of armed men, some thousands in number, issued from the neighbouring Manee Ghaut [Mawi Jat] village of Huldwanee [Hilwari]'. Dunlop wrote afterwards: 'I had but little idea, when leaving Deolah, of the extent to which disaffection had reached in some of the villages between that place and Burrowth.' After a skirmish which suddenly dispelled his well-nigh fatal delusion of universal Jat loyalty, his party succeeded in fleeing to Baraut some three miles off. Here he found that the attack from the 'townspeople' of Baraut and Malakpur, the village immediately to the west, where the leader was an old white-bearded Sikh was already underway.[48]

There was barely time for Major G. Williams, officer commanding, to turn about and confront Shah Mal's hordes, estimated at some 3,500. The fight waxed furious, but the forty Europeans of the 60th Rifles, who were armed with Enfields and advanced in skirmishing line with the Volunteer Horse on their flanks, wrought deadly execution. Once their rustic matchlocks had been discharged, and with no time to re-load, Shah Mal's peasant followers broke and ran, leaving some 200 dead. Shah Mal was found among the slain; his severed head was paraded through the town. Yet the extent of the rural rising and the news that a rebel force had been sent out from Delhi in answer to Shah Mal's appeal counselled a hasty withdrawal for the Khakis. In a note scribbled to the Commissioner at 2 p.m. Major Williams reported: 'the whole country is against us, 86 villages—it is said 10,000 attack us tonight, but with these jolly Rifles we are equal to them, though the rascals fight desperately. We were nearly taken by surprise expecting a friendly reception.'[49]

The force marched that night north-east and forded the Hindan at daybreak near Barnawa, 'followed down to the ford by a large

[48] The 'old white-bearded Sikh, who had long lived in Mullutpore [Malakpur]', was subsequently hanged by Dunlop in October (*Service and Adventure*, p. 104). The population of Baraut was recorded as 12,350 compared with 29,014 for Meerut, 13,598 for Hapur, and 13,878 for Chhaprauli; E. Thornton, *Gazetteer of the Territories under the Government of the E.I. Company* (London, 1854).

[49] Copy G. Williams to Mr Williams, Barote, Saturday, 2 p.m. [18 July 1857]; MSS Eur. C 94, f. 114. For the fight at Baraut, *NE* i. 265–6; PP 1857–8, xliv, pt. 4, pp. 1072–6; Dunlop, *Service and Adventure*, pp. 103 ff.

body of Mavee Jats, who hoped they might find an opportunity of taking the head of Shah Mull from us'.

The Jat rebellion survived Shah Mal's death, his nephew, Bugla Ram, and grandson (Sajja Mal) taking over the leadership. How Shah Mal had been able 'to seduce the inhabitants of eight-four villages, principally Jats, known as the Chowrasee Des from their allegiance to Government' continued to puzzle the British.[50]

> . . . without the slightest cause or the slightest excuse these thriving agriculturalists became rebels. The Pergunnah is the finest and perhaps the most lightly assessed in the Doab. But for the invitation and cooperation of these rebels the mutineers in Delhi would never have dared to come near the Pergunnah with the danger of a flank movement against them from the Delhie Camp and Meerut, unsupported by these villagers. Shah Mull, a common thief, would have been disposed of by the Police. But the whole population threw themselves heart and soul in to the combination against Government, and to this in great measure the protraction of the siege of Delhi may be ascribed, and a great deal of the disaffection in the Meerut and neighbouring Districts . . . The men turned out repeatedly to fight Government troops . . . From every village vast quantities of supplies were poured into Delhi, the garrison of which but for this assistance would have been starved out.[51]

There were serious distortions in this account of Commissioner Williams. Despite its productivity in the hands of the Jats, Baraut pargana was not lightly assessed, nor could Shah Mal be written off as 'a common thief', nor was rebellion there 'without the slightest cause or the slightest excuse'. Williams was confusing the revenue history of Baraut with that of Baghpat pargana to the south, where, for somewhat obscure reasons, Sir Henry Elliot had found himself unable in 1837 to raise the low demand to its proper level. In contrast Baraut had formed part of the Begam Samru's 'estate' centred on Sardhana, and was notorious for the manner in which cash crop agriculture had been enforced by semi-coercive methods and an extraordinarily high revenue demand. On resumption of the *jagir* in 1836, it was settled four years later by T. C. Plowden at what he considered moderate terms but which in effect left the demand pitched at nearly double the incidence at Baghpat. Moreover, he retained the practice of imposing differentially heavier

[50] F. Williams, Commr. Meerut, 7 Aug. 1857; PP 1857–8, xliv, pt. 4, p. 1072.

[51] Meerut Confiscations Statement, Commr. Williams's remarks against Nos. 27–85, NWP Rev. Progs., Sept. 1859, No. 301 (P/221/30).

rates on the industrious Jats compared with other cases, particularly Tyagis.[52] It was not until the later 1860s that the oppressiveness of the burden on the Jats was appreciated by the revenue authorities.

Despite these circumstances the agricultural economy had expanded under the influence of the East Jumna Canal. By the mid-1860s the culturable waste in Baraut had diminished by nearly one-half, the irrigation had more than doubled, so that out of 39,745 cultivated acres, only 4,416 remained unirrigated. Yet the Canal did not bring unalloyed contentment. William Muir, as Member of the Revenue Board, toured along its entire length in the year before the outbreak and found serious disaffection among the people at the arbitrary manner in which construction and repair charges for the distributaries were levied on the village *zamindars*.[53] Other local circumstances deepened the discontent. The Jats were renowned for their individualism and their unreadiness to heed the authority of elder or headman. Joint responsibility for the revenue through representative *lambardars* worked badly, and the Collector reported in 1854 that because of the disputes between *lambardars* and co-parcenees (*hissadars*) an exceptionally large number of peremptory notices to pay (*dastaks*) had been issued to individuals during the previous season in the *bhaiachara* villages of the district.[54] The rising of the Chaurasi Des had all the spontaneity of a peasant tax rebellion, which was touched off when Dunlop came out to collect the overdue instalments of the revenue demand. But how was it sustained and what elements did it embrace? So far from being 'a common thief', Shah Mal held a half share in the large and prosperous village of Bijraul whose lands were found in the 1860s to bear the highest rent rates in the district.[55] This made him a man of substance whose motives can only be surmised. He may have been smarting under the severity of the revenue assessment; he may have also been caught up in a factional fight with the local administration. Shah Mal belonged to a small Jat group

[52] H. M. Elliot, *Meerut SR*, p. 18.

[53] Muir, *Intelligence Records*, i. 232–3.

[54] F. D. Wylly, Collr.'s annual reply, 11 July 1983, NWP Rev. Progs., 4 Mar. 1854, No. 25, para. 3 (P/220/29).

[55] Comparative Statement of Old and Proposed Assessment in Pergunnah Barote, 11 Mar. 1867, UP State Archives, Lucknow, BR Meerut, File 27, Box 5. In 1960 an 'independence tower' was erected in Bijraul dedicated to Shah Mal's memory. *UP DG Meerut* (1965), p. 331.

known as 'Muwee' or 'Mawee' or 'Mavi', about which little is known. Elliot recorded in his rough settlement book that four villages were called Mawee within the area of the Salaklain tribe of Jats who held a chaurasi of eighty-four villages with its headquarters at Baraut. Cracroft Wilson (admittedly not a particularly reliable guide) names Baoli, Bijraul, Johri, Lohara, Hilwari, and Malakpur as belonging to the 'Mouway Jats'. Dunlop adds Sirsali.[56]

These villages formed a compact group straddling the East Jumna Canal immediately above the town of Baraut, and spanning an area some eight miles across and four deep. Their place in the wider sphere of Jat action is necessarily obscure. The Mawis were one of the numerous Jat *gots* or clans, some ninety-two in all, to be found in the Meerut district. The fissiparous character of clan lineages meant that political organization had to be constructed territorially out of groups (*thambas*, *thoks*) of clan-held villages. Not all villages in a *khap* would belong to the Jat 'tribe', and only three of the Jat *khaps* in the Meerut division appear to have been totally dominated by a single Jat clan. Two of these—the Gathwala *khap* belonging to the Lal Jats and the Baliyan *khap* belonging to the Kashyap *got*—lay over the district border to the north in Muzaffarnagar. The third, the Salaklain *khap* of the Tomar Jats, held the notional *chaurasi* or eighty-four villages known as the Chaurasi Des in the Baraut and Barnawa parganas. The Mawi Jats formed part of the Salaklain *khap*. In 1836 Elliot had reported that among the Jat and Rajput communities, the *chaurasis* could be considered to exist 'in almost their pristine integrity' and that the head man of the chief villages in these communities was still looked up to as a superior, 'to whom all others of the clan owe allegiance, and are scarcely considered to be endowed with the responsibility and consequences of zemindars until he has presided at the ceremony of binding on their turbans'. How far even the major clan groups continued to enjoy effective superior political organization above the village level is questionable, since the whole tendency of British police and revenue arrangements was to break down these petty jurisdictions and group them into new units determined by British administrative convenience. Elliot's proposals to make use of the structure in

[56] H. M. Elliot, Settlement Book, MSS Eur. F 56, f. 109; Cracroft Wilson, *NE* i. 421; Dunlop, *Service and Adventure*, p. 108. Names are modernized.

revenue collection were not taken up, and by the 1860s, W. A. Forbes was nodding his head ruefully:

> All the old local division of estates, castes, and tribes have been lost to us. Even the families of the 'chowdries' or heads of clans cannot now be traced out. Ours has been a utilitarian and levelling rule. With the rajahs and talookdars in the North-West Provinces went all power to influence the people for good through their acknowledged clan chiefs.[57]

While the Jat grip on the land has remained to this day, there were signs that tenurial structure was coming under strain well before 1857. The *bhaiachara* tenure lends itself readily to dissolution into a *ryotwar* or small-scale *zamindari* system, in which joint responsibility for revenue payment and joint ownership of common land has ended and a region of separate 'freehold' properties has been established.

The pressure of external administration on the Chaurasi Des was maintained into the period after the lapse of the Begam Samru's estate. The British inherited two *tahsildars* from her administration —Francis Koine (Cohen), *tahsildar* of Baghpat, and Salig Ram, *tahsildar* of Baraut. Cohen was said to have been an ensign in the Begam's service and after her death in 1836 became *tahsildar*. He is almost certainly to be identified with Francis Cohen of Harchandpur who gave shelter to a party of European fugitives from Delhi and was rewarded with the grant of three villages. He had begun acquiring landed property at an early date, holding it in the name of his wife. In 1844 it is known that he thus acquired at a compulsory sale for debt, a small parcel of land in the village of Barka, near Baraut, where Dunlop later obtained a friendly reception. In 1853 Koine was dismissed as unsatisfactory. His rival, Salig Ram, was 'a Bunneah of Delhi', and the nephew of the former incumbent 'who with his grandfather had long been good servants of the State and the latter of whom was Nazim of this whole part of the country prior to our possession'.[58] When Charles Gubbins became Collector of Meerut in 1848, he was given long accounts of Salig Ram's malpractices and was satisfied that Salig Ram 'had long been levying

[57] *Meerut SR 1874*, p. 34; H. M. Elliot, 31 Aug. 1836, *Reps. Rev. Settl. NWP* i. 211; Pradhan, *Political System of the Jats*.

[58] On Francis Cohen (Koine), NWP Rev. Progs., 13 Apr. 1854, Nos. 268–9 (P/220/31). See also Vibart, *The Sepoy Mutiny*, p. 107 and C. Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny* (London, 1978), p. 118. Hibbert calls him 'an old German Jew'. On Salig Ram, NWP Rev. Progs., 9 Aug. 1854, Nos. 67–99 (P/220/39).

general contributions on the community'. There was hardly one assessment paper of the *tahsil* that had come to his notice in which the *tahsildar* was not put down for some sum. He believed that he was 'trafficking in all manner of produce', obtaining grain and sending out men to cut grass without payment. At festivals he was in the habit of taking large presents. Among the complainants was the village of Baoli, and among those from whom Salig Ram had levied Chamar labour was Malakpur. These were Mawi Jat villages. The commissioner held the charges to be non-proven and ordered Salig Ram's reinstatement in 1854.

Whatever the provocation offered, Shah Mal was said to have risen up instantly. 'On the night of 10 May a large body of escaped prisoners went to his village, and from that moment he commenced hatching mischief.' His first allies would thus appear to have been drawn from the Gujar gaolbirds from Meerut, but his principal Gujar support does not seem to have been from these wilder elements or from the fierce cattle-drovers of the Jumna and Hindan *khadir* in the Loni pargana close to Delhi. Instead Shah Mal drew to his side the Gujars of a group of villages that stood between Baghpat and Daula (Deola) north and south of the Baghpat–Meerut road. The first three 'belonging in part to Jats'—Bagu, Nibali, and Bali—were said to have rendered the roads to Baghpat impassable for a time and to have actively engaged in the plunder of the Baghpat bazaar. A couple of miles south of the road close to Harchandpur was the royal village (*tyul*) of Akhera, whose Gujar inhabitants were indicted for joining Shah Mal and helping to plunder the *tahsil* offices at Baraut and the town of Baghpat. All these villages lay in good, irrigated soil and were intermingled with Jat settlement. Just as strange appeared the co-operation Shah Mal received from the Tyagi villages of Basaund and Chopra, in view of the hereditary feud between Jat and Tyagi upon which Forbes was still commenting in the 1860s.[59]

It may be supposed that like the Muslim Baluchi inhabitants of Bilochpura, these non-Jat elements were drawn into the fray by the organization of the Salaklain clan *khap*. Jat cohesion was momen-

[59] For these Gujar villages, Dunlop to F. Williams, 11 Nov. 1857, NWP Pol Progs., 29 Nov. 1858, No. 132 (P/230/83). For Dunlop to Commissioner, 26 June 1857, PP 1857–8, xliv, pt. 4, p. 1074. Also Basaund and Chopra, Dunlop, *Service and Adventure*, pp. 93, 97. In Basaund the Tyagis are described as Muslim.

tarily solid, the only significant defector being Mohur Singh, who held one of the *pattis* belonging to Baraut township.[60]

Yet the extension of rebellion northwards beyond the boundaries of the Salaklain *khap* among Jats with whom the Salaklains were traditionally at odds is a still more remarkable feature. The Barnawa pargana lay between Baraut pargana and the Hindan river and was bisected from west to east by the Kirsani river. The Salaklains or Des Jats held the southern part of the Barnawa pargana but the northern part was almost entirely comprised within the lands of four exceptionally large villages, the so-called *Chaugaon* of Doghat, Nirpura, Tikri, and Daha. Belonging to a number of Jat castes in which the Rana *got* was predominant, they had in times past resented the intrusion of the Salaklains in the north across the Kirsani, and at Bamnauli 'tradition says the Marka hillock was erected to commemorate a terrible fight between the hostile Jats of Baraut and Doghat'.[61] The area north of the Kirsani, although possessed of some fine tracts of *bangar* upland, lacked the security of canal irrigation. But the Chaugaon drew some benefits from industrial pursuits. Doghat enjoyed a local celebrity for its leather, while Nirpura was famous for blankets. Indeed, it was while on a visit to Nirpura to procure Rs. 1,600 worth of blankets for his regiment that *havildar* Qalandar Khan learned of the mutiny in Meerut on the night of 19 May and immediately set himself up as a local ruler, doubtless gaining the support of the Muslim weaving community of Julahas in the township.[62] The Chaugaon Jats, like others in the former *jagir* of the Begam Samru, found themselves heavily mulcted by the revenue settlement carried out by T. C. Plowden in 1840. Doubtless due to its turbulent reputation, the pargana had experienced few inroads from moneyed men seeking

[60] Mohur Singh fled to Baburgarh where with Jumayet Singh he helped defend the Government Stud Depot with their fellow Jats against the Gujars and other marauders; Statement of Proposed Rewards, Meerut Division, entries 96, 97. NWP Pol. Progs., Jan. 1859, No. 255, P/230/86. It is said that he was 'almost the only man among the Jats of the Barout Pergunnah who did not join Shah Mull'. There were also indeed other Jats, notably Nawal Singh, Sookh Singh, and Deodar Singh, who brought a strong party and helped defend the *thanah* against Shah Mal, which otherwise would not have been able to hold out; Com. (Meerut), Dept. XII, Rev. File 40/1859. F. Williams to G. Couper, 6 Aug. 1859.

[61] Atkinson, *Gaz.* iii (1), 355; Pradhan, *Political System of the Jats*, p. 249; *Meerut SR 1874*, p. 44.

[62] On the Chaugaon, Atkinson, *Gaz.* iii (1), 369, 418, 438; Nevill, *DGUP iv, Meerut*, pp. 215, 222, 288, 315. On Qalandar Khan, *NE* i. 256; Dunlop, *Service and Adventure*, p. 46.

property titles and transfers were extremely low. The Jats of Daha, who had 'always been a troublesome and aggressive race and are credited with many acts of violence', leagued with their brethren of Doghat to bid armed defiance to the *tahsildar* of Sardhana.[63] But the British official found more immediate danger and aggressive violence from the nearer ravine villages of the Hindan which curved in an arc to the north and west of Sardhana, and which were mainly peopled by Rajput groups, often Muslim in persuasion. At the outset of mutiny on 11 and 12 May, the *tahsil* offices at Sardhana had been subjected to instant attack from Nirput Singh and his Rajputs of Akulpura, a large village standing in sandy soil near the point where the Hindan entered the pargana. When Dunlop's force retreated from Baraut with the head of Shah Mal, it made its way to Sardhana on 20 July. Here when he summoned the *lambardars* of villages to set revenue collection in train, he met with defiance from Akulpura, although the neighbouring village of Rardhana Garhi under Rhydul (Rai Dal?), a relative of Nirput Singh's and 'the chief of the Rajpoots in the neighbourhood', made due submission. Akulpura was dealt the usual pitiless punishment, all males found in the village being killed, and the strikingly handsome body of Nirput Singh numbered among the slain. Despite this exemplary chastisement, Dunlop had to return within a few days to Sardhana from Meerut and strengthen the defences because of 'the news having reached us that a large number of Mussulmans, and Mavee Jats, and others were collecting from Binowlee [Binauli] and Prassowlee [Parasauli] at a place called Boorhana [Budhana], with the intention of plundering the Palace and Cathedral [at Sardhana]'.[64] In the event the countermeasures proved sufficient deterrent, although there was further trouble to come from the Rajput and Rangar ravine villages along the Hindan. The continued Jat rebellion under Shah Mal's grandson Syja and his nephew Bugta encouraged a fresh wave of disaffection in the Barnawa pargana. The inhabitants of Nagla (Nagwa?) drove out the revenue

[63] List of persons eminent for disloyalty in Meerut Division; NWP Pol. Progs., Dec. 1858, No. 208.

[64] Rai Dal informed the *tahsildar* of Nirput Singh's impending attack on 11 May, so there would appear to have been personal or factional rivalry at work. PP 1857–8, xliv, pt. 4, p. 1074; Dunlop, *Service and Adventure*, pp. 113 ff. Both *NE* i. 266 and Major Williams (PP 1857–8, xliv, pt. 4, p. 1076) speak of 'Gurhee' having been attacked. In fact Dunlop had the greatest difficulty in preventing Radhana Garhi from being assaulted and the attack diverted to Akulpura. Meerut Confiscations Statement, loc. cit., entry IIIB, 25.

peons, and at Panchli Buzurg the police were resisted, so that on 13 August a small force was dispatched to destroy the rebellious Rangar portion of Panchli Buzurg and then crossed the Hindan to destroy Bopura and Nagla. With these villages may also be classed Khiwai, another Rangar stronghold, which although spared retribution was reported by Dunlop as seriously disaffected.[65] When Professor Radhakamal Mukherjee's MA student pried into Khiwai in 1930, he found the swollen Chauhan Rajput and Muslim Rajput community still persisting in its ancient thriftless ways despite serious poverty and a standard of living well below that of their tenants.[66]

These events made nonsense of Dunlop's classification of 'loyalty' and 'rebellion' according to monolithic caste categories. Apart from internal feuds as at Radhana and Panchli Buzurg, Rajput response appeared to divide according to material circumstance. The ravine villages, containing traditionally turbulent elements which lacked the incentives for profitable agriculture, seemed to turn instinctively to rebellion, while villages like Deola or nearby Hissouda, that were placed to enjoy the full benefits of irrigation from the East Jumna Canal, proved active collaborators with the British. Jat action, however, lends itself to no such easy explanation. One might suppose that Jat participation in the threat to Sardhana reflected the old hostility to the Begum Samru's administration centred on that town. This was perhaps why the Jats of Binauli came together with the Rangars of Parasauli both of whom had suffered under the estate administration. Yet why should the more distant Salaklain Jats have bestirred themselves into such active hostility when the Karnawal Jats who traditionally held twenty-five villages immediately to the south-west of Sardhana remained so strikingly quiescent? Compared with the Salaklain Jats of Baraut and Barnawa, they had been shorn no less closely by the British tax shearer. Nowhere was the differential system of assessment more heavily weighted against the Jat agriculturalist than in Sardhana. When J. S. Porter came to revise the settlement in 1868, his first concern was to give relief to the 'highly taxed' Jats. Not

[65] *NE* i. 269. Meerut Confiscations Statement, loc. cit., entry IIIB, 26. Dunlop, *Service and Adventure*, p. 111. R. H. Dunlop to F. Williams, 14 and 15 Aug. 1857; NWP Pol. Progs., 29 Nov. 1858, Nos. 129–30.

[66] Report on Khiwai by Kunwar Bahadur, *UP Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee Report, 1929–30* (Calcutta, 1930), ii (Evidence), 227–30.

only had the original settlement been 'oppressive', but it could not be met by extended cultivation, the Jat villages in 1840 having little unbroken waste. One Jat village, Sarupur, had been compelled to sustain a revenue rate of Rs. 5-3-5 per cultivated acre while the similarly circumstanced lands of the Tyagi-owned township of Sardhana next door had been rated at only Rs. 1-8-11.[67] Was it perhaps that here in the Sardhana pargana the Jats felt a minority group—Hindu Jats forming only some 8 per cent of total population as against some 26 per cent elsewhere in the district? Or did the immediate proximity of British power in Meerut and of Gujar depredations a little to the south induce a due caution? Whatever the cause, in Meerut, as in Muzaffarnagar district to the north, the monsoon-swollen Hindan river formed the political divide.

Yet it would be wrong to suggest that Rajput uprising was only a concomitant of unrewarding agriculture. In the south of the district in the Dasna pargana and the south-east corner of the Jalalabad pargana Rajput landholding and cultivation was prevalent. There was as yet no undue crowding such as marked the Jat settlements west of the Hindan. During the thirty years' settlement from 1836, cultivation expanded nearly 30 per cent, and once the Ganges Canal was working, the irrigated area expanded prodigiously. Doubtless in 1867 it was difficult to gauge the conditions obtaining ten years earlier, but the settlement officer's general remarks must have remained applicable. He found the Rajputs in Dasna 'decidedly of a more industrious class than that caste are generally considered to be. The farming is of the highest order, and the richest products, particularly cotton and wheat, are grown extensively.'[68] In these circumstances he was unable to explain widespread rebellion; 'certainly it was not by reason of heavy assessment and indigence of circumstances'. The assessment was not as light as Forbes represented it, falling at Rs.2-0-5 not Rs. 1-4-7 to the cultivated acre, and had no doubt acted as a sharp spur for opening up the arable waste within the village (or *mauza*) boundaries. The principal Rajput clan was the Tomar (Tuar) who according to Cracroft Wilson held a *chaurasi* of villages headed by the large village of Pilkhua some seven miles west of Hapur on the main Garmukhtesar–Delhi road. The Tomars were a proud clan claiming descent from the Pandavas and kinship with the Tomar rajas of Delhi.[69]

[67] *Meerut SR 1874*, pp. 40–4.
[68] *Meerut SR 1874*, p. 28.

In 1857 they found themselves caught on the shadowy frontier between the regions controlled by the British and the rebel regime. After Wilson's successful action at the Hindan bridge on 30 and 31 May, the British had continued to keep some sort of control to the south as far as Ghaziabad, but in late July, just at the time that the Khakis raced back from Sardhana after defeating Shah Mal to deal with the renewed threat of a thrust on Hapur by Walidad Khan from Malagarh, a rebel force moved up from the Ghaziabad area and seized the British *tahsili* offices at Muradnagar. The Meerut authorities did not feel strong enough to recover the lost ground and pulled back the *tahsili* to Mohiuddinpur, a mere eight miles from Meerut. The result was that 'officials appointed by the rebel king, spread over the Mooradnagar, Dasnah and Dhoulana country'. The British nevertheless kept hold of Hapur partly to support the Hapur and Bhutona Jats who had fought so successfully against Walidad's advances. The Hapur Jats were old rivals of the Tomar Rajputs[70] having displaced them from their lands in earlier times. Walidad was reinforced during August from Delhi by the Jhansi Brigade, said to have consisted of five companies of the 12 NI, the 14th Irregular Cavalry, 500 irregular infantry, and three 9-pounders. F. Williams, the Meerut Commissioner, took alarm lest Walidad should again attempt an advance on Meerut itself, and find support from the Baraut Jats and the Mawana Gujars on either flank. The ailing Lieutenant-Governor, J. R. Colvin, wrote on 25 August to Wilson, commanding the Delhi Field Force, to see whether Meerut could be reinforced, but Wilson was straining every nerve for the assault on Delhi, and decided instead to bleed Meerut white, summoning a further 200 men from HM 60th Rifles and other details. It was, therefore, determined to put on a bold front to disguise what was felt to be the extreme weakness of the force remaining at Meerut. On 27 August the strongest column hitherto dispatched took the road for Hapur. It numbered some 300 men, leaving 1,649 to garrison Meerut, half of which were Europeans. Taking advantage of the renewed British presence at Hapur, Cracroft Wilson sent out demands for Pilkhua to pay its revenue instalments, but the *chaprasis* (agents) were murdered. A British detachment thereupon came out from Hapur on 8 September, surrounded the village,

[69] J. C. Wilson, 5 Apr. 1858; NWP Pol. Progs., 25 July 1858, No. 278 (P/231/1). *DG UP iv, Meerut* (1904), p. 91.

[70] *NE* i. 270–1; H. M. Elliot, Revenue Papers, MSS Eur. F 60B, ff. 382–3.

and slaughtered sixty men among those who sought to escape. Afterwards Wilson reported: 'If there is a Qusbah [small town] which deserved confiscation Pilkowah is that Qusbah.'[71]

Colonel Ahmad Khan, who had been posted at Ghaziabad by the Delhi regime, reported to the King in alarm the next day that some thirty whites and 300 Jats of the '(Dubeeq) Duheeya caste' and four guns had sacked and burned Pilkhua and three or four of the surrounding villages. As a result, the *zamindars* of the surrounding country had begun paying the revenue, and the supplies that used to be sent to Delhi from Pilkhua had been cut off. There was also danger that the strong masonry fortess at Muqimpur (two miles north of Pilkhua) containing 50–60 maunds of old gunpowder would fall into British hands.[72] Clearly there had been some active collaboration with the Delhi regime, Sowai Singh, one of the co-sharers, having been allowed to come to Pilkhua with rebel *sowars* to recruit more of their number.

Six miles south of Pilkhua lay Daulana. When the King of Delhi established a *tahsildar* at Muradnagar and officials at Dasna, the *thanadar* of Daulana, Tarib Ali, stuck to his post. 'A number of villages of that quarter which is known as Rajpootana were disaffected and at last the Dhaulana men rose and declared for the King of Delhi', destroying the *thana* and taking Tarib Ali prisoner. Yet the Rajputs of the neighbouring village of Sheolana, a mile to the south, attacked Dhaulana, rescued Tarib Ali, and removed the Government *thana* to Solana. Here old factional disputes were probably at work. At one time the people of Dhaulana used to worship at Nagla Kashi (two miles south of Sheolana), 'but about thirty years ago [*c.*1846] the hostile Rajputs of these two villages fought at the fair held in honour of the *sati* Malanda' after which they built a fine temple in Dhaulana to Malandi Devi.[73]

Colonel Ahmad Khan received no response to his plea for rebel forces to restore the King's grip on the Pilkhua region. Rebel morale was fast failing by early September, and from 8 September the portentous voice of the British siege batteries before Delhi began reverberating across the countryside. Daulana had felt the

[71] J. C. Wilson, 5 Apr. 1858, loc. cit. For Colvin's letter, Muir, *Intelligence Records*, i. 144. *NE* i. 270–1.

[72] Petition from Col. Ahmed Khan, 19 Moham. year 1274 Hijri. National Archives, Delhi. Mutiny Papers, Colln. No. 199, serial 327.

[73] Atkinson, *Gaz.* iii (1), 372–3. Statement of Proposed Rewards, Meerut Divn., 20 Nov. 1858; NWP Pol. Progs., Jan. 1859, No. 255 (P/230/86). *NE* i. 264.

encroaching tentacles of the Skinner estate. By 1847, 'Humeer Singh' had mortgaged his 97 *bighas* in return for a loan of Rs. 200 from Colonel Skinner, and later was said to have dispossessed the Skinners. Not surprisingly, Hamir Singh was proscribed as a rebel and his property confiscated.[74]

[74] Zillah Court Decisions NWP, 1859, Meerut, p. 34. *Skinner* v. *Humeer Singh*.

6

REBELLION IN THE MUZAFFARNAGAR DISTRICT

THIS somewhat detailed study of the response to the 1857 crisis in the Meerut district would appear to suggest that each dominant land-controlling group fought for its own hand in its own time, irrespective of the wider potential unities of religion, caste, tribe, or nation. The absence of concert meant that the British district officials had little difficulty in suppressing or containing rural disturbance by means of a scratch force of two to three hundred armed men. Yet west of the Hindan river the countryside seemed to rally in a more sustained fashion, sinking local differences and manifesting something of a common resistance to the British power. This pattern of response continued northwards into the Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur districts. At first glance it was a remarkable phenomenon belying normal calculations. For this western portion of the upper Doab embraced the East Jumna Canal tract, where cash-crop peasant agriculture was at its most thriving and productive and where land rights had been affected far less than elsewhere by transfers and the intrusion of the trading and moneylending castes.

Hence in Muzaffarnagar district, as in Meerut district immediately below it, the British at first looked east rather than west for signs of the gathering storm. Not only were the wilder *khadir* tracts along the Ganges the haunt of Gujar graziers, but at this point the district abutted on to Bijnor and the ostensibly Muslim-led rebel regime in Rohilkhand. That regime seemed to have natural collaborators in the Barha Sayyids of Muzaffarnagar who remained the paramount landholding community in all the eastern parganas—in the *huzur* pargana of Muzaffarnagar itself, in Khatauli, Jansath, Bhuma-Sambalhera, and Bhukaheri. Their history armed them with a catalogue of grievances. As a dominant gentry they had risen and fallen with the Mughal empire. At the outset of British rule the damage which their land rights had suffered from the erection of the great Gujar fiscal lordships in the later eighteenth century had

been partially redressed, but they quickly fell victim to subtler foes:

> From the beginning of 1805 to the present time the Sayyids have gone steadily to ruin, but henceforth they had nothing to fear from violence. The new dangers to which they were exposed were more insidious and still more fatal than the old; and when the Sayyids fell victims to their own extravagance and our revenue procedure, to the civil courts and the ever watchful moneylender, they had reason almost to regret the days when they were vassals of Gujar chiefs or of Mahratta soldiers.[1]

Land rights were transferred more extensively in eastern Muzaffarnagar than in any other part of the Meerut division. In the twenty years between 1841 and 1861, title to 44 per cent of the land was transferred in Bhukaheri, 47 per cent in Khatauli, and 50 per cent in Bhuma-Sambalhera (exclusive of land confiscated for rebellion). Sayyid losses were even more extensive in some cases, amounting to 56 per cent of their properties in Khatauli and 57 per cent in Bhukaheri.[2] Of the 23,000 acres with which they parted in Bhukaheri, no less than 18,000 passed to the moneylenders. Some of the leading Sayyid families were reduced to ruin, sinking to the level of humble cultivators or taking service as lowly peons and *chaprasis*. The Kundliwals fell into illiteracy and many of them had to eke out a livelihood by manual labour. Their one consolation was public pity: 'the poorest Sayyid cultivator is still spoken of as a Sayyid sahib, and is treated with a degree of respect which is often denied to the richest of his neighbours'.[3]

Not all Sayyids, however, shared the common fate. A few enterprising men seized the opportunity of obtaining higher office under the British, and used their position as *tahsildars* and *munsifs* (inferior judges) to build up considerable properties. A substantial portion of the Sayyid land transferred between 1841 and 1861 was acquired by a handful of powerful families whose notables were Sayyid Husain Ali Khan and his nephews of Jansath, Sayyid Amir Husain and Wazir Husain of Sambalhera, and Ghulam Husain of Jauli. In 1857, Husain Ali Khan was not only 'a very extensive land-holder' but also *tahsildar* of Khurja in Bulandshahr district. Tafazal Husain of Miranpur held office as *tahsildar* of Hapur in Meerut district, while Sayyid Imdad Husain served as *tahsildar* of

[1] A Cadell, *Ganges Canal Tract, Muzaffarnagar District SR 1878*, p. 28.
[2] For details, Stokes, *Peasant and the Raj*, pp. 176–7.
[3] Cadell, *Ganges Canal Tract*, pp. 18, 33. On Kundliwals, Atkinson, *Gaz.* iii. 596.

Muzaffarnagar itself. With the advantages and prestige of office, men like Tafazal Husain were able to borrow considerable sums on bond and to evade pressure for repayment.[4]

Despite the heavy overall losses of Sayyid land rights, the controlling local political influence in the eastern part of the district remained in their hands, although Sayyids numbered (in 1865) no more than 8,000 in a total population of some 243,000, or rather over 3 per cent. They continued to be the largest single class of proprietors, still owning a third of the region in 1872 compared with the two-thirds they had held just after the British conquest. The bigger men, like the Jansath and Sambalhera families, exercised a wide authority, having their properties distributed in each of the eastern parganas. Their yoke was not unduly heavy, over half the cultivation being held under occupancy tenure by cultivators who had retained many of the primary rights in the soil. Rents were paid in kind as a proportion of the crop, a situation which before the price rise of the 1860s acted as a safeguard of custom and a bulwark against exaction. Hence while owner-cultivator (*bhaiachara*) tenures accounted for only some 29 per cent of estates and owners themselves cultivated only 22 per cent of the cultivated area,[5] there was probably much less derangement of village structures than might be supposed from the high rate of proprietary transfers. After Edward Thornton's settlement of 1841, the revenue demand (except in Bhuma-Sambalhera) fell moderately, and in 1854 the opening of the Ganges Canal opened the prospect of a new era of prosperity. Impoverished Sayyid communities might find themselves falling below the level of the labourer, but they were more isolated in their grievances than the British supposed.

Response to the crisis of 1857 is of more than usual interest in the Muzaffarnagar district because British control remained so reduced for some seven weeks after the outbreak that it can scarcely be said to have existed outside the district capital. At the same time there was no rebel sepoy presence nor rebel magnate able and willing to seize power. Conditions thus appeared propitious for showing the natural set of the countryside without the interference of distorting elements.

[4] *Sheopershad* v. *Taffazal Husain*, 2 Dec. 1858, Zillah Court Decisions NWP, 1859, Meerut, p. 94.

[5] Figures are calculated from those supplied in Cadell's *Report*, pp. 11–12. *Bhaiachara* figures are given in *Gaz.* iii. 551, Cadell classing all such tenures as imperfect *pattidari.*

News of the outbreak at Meerut, some forty miles distant, threw the authorities and townspeople in Muzaffarnagar into extreme disarray as wild rumours of the approach of mutinous regiments swept the station. The only troops at hand were a *subadar* and thirty-five men of the 20th NI who formed the treasury guard and whose parent regiment had defected to a man on the night of 10 May in Meerut. Barford, the Magistrate, decided to close the public offices and withdraw the small European community into the *tahsil* compound, an action which was followed by the looting and burning of the deserted European bungalows on the night of 13 May. Grant, the joint Magistrate, maintained afterwards that 'the impoverished Syud zemindars of Mozuffarnuggur instigated the villagers to commit these excesses'. Barford's attempt to move the treasure into the *tahsil* the next day provoked open mutiny among the detachment of the 20th NI who promptly made off with as much of the treasure as they could carry and left the rest to be looted by the townsfolk and the subordinate officialdom. To reinforce his own guard of twelve men and the seventy or so *barkandazes* of the *thana* and *tahsil*, Barford now ordered the convicts in the gaol to be released and the gaol guard to join him. With this further sign of the collapse of British authority the villagers moved in to destroy the gaol and put to the torch the civil and criminal court buildings and the Collectorate office. Grant said afterwards that he was 'decidedly of opinion' that 'the destruction of the records was brought about by the Syuds' and suspected the *tahsildar*, Sayyid Imdad Husain, and the *kotwal*, Ahmad Husain, of conniving at the destruction. Yet with the departure of the small mutinous sepoy detachment, no organized movement to oust the Europeans materialized, and the scratch force of police *sowars* (horsemen) and matchlockmen proved sufficient to keep order in the town and to repress local attacks by villagers and dacoits. In the countryside the police remained supine.

> The natural result was that violent crimes of all kinds were daily, almost hourly, committed throughout the district, not secretly or by night, but openly and at noonday. [As] in other parts of the country the bunyas and mahajuns were, in the majority of cases, the victims, and fearfully have many of them been made to suffer for their previous rapacity and avarice.[6]

On about 18 May, a party of the 3rd Light Cavalry arrived from Meerut; this was the loyal element which had remained behind after

[6] *NE* i. 352.

the bulk of the regiment had mutinied and ridden off to Delhi on the night of 10 May. On 29 May they were replaced by eighty Pathan troopers of the 4th Irregular Cavalry. Such reinforcements enabled the more refractory villages to be punished, roads to be patrolled, and a small amount of revenue to be collected in the *huzur* and Khatauli *tahsils*. Grant visited Shamli to reopen the Meerut–Karnal post route and found that Ibrahim Khan, the *tahsildar*, had matters in good order. The dependence of the British on their subordinate officials was now to be shown. On 21 June the troopers of the Irregular Cavalry stationed at Muzaffarnagar rose in mutiny and murdered their British officer. They then besieged the *tahsil* building, calling out to all true Muslims to come over to them and demanding that the European 'Kaffirs' should be given up. Sayyid Imdad Husain, the *tahsildar*, and Daud Khan, the *daffardar* of *sowars*, refused to surrender the Europeans and bought the departure of the mutinous troopers from the station with a payment of some Rs. 6,000. Despite this signal act of loyalty, the Sayyids remained suspect. R. M. Edwards, who arrived to take over the district on 1 July accompanied by a force of 130 Gurkhas of the Nasiri battalion, confided to his diary on 11 July that the *tahsildar*, Imdad Husain, had not made his usual daily appearance. 'It is to be hoped that he is not plotting with the other Syed Tuhseeldars. I have little confidence in any of them.' After continued collaboration, he was forced to conclude by 24 July that while the Muslim population had its heart with the King of Delhi, fear of the probable consequences prevented them from openly declaring themselves until some signal success at Delhi should enable them to throw off the mask and appear in their true colours.[7]

Edwards may well have been right, but he underestimated the stake of men like Imdad Husain in the existing order. They were already in virtual command of the eastern half of the district. When Barford had sought safety it was with the Sayyids of the nearby village of Abupura that he had taken refuge, and it was with Imdad Husain's cousin, Kasim Ali at Jauli, that at the outset Barford had proposed finding protection, if he had lost control of the district capital. It was scarcely in the magnate's interests to abet the turbulence of the impoverished Sayyids of the *huzur* pargana in their resentment against moneylender creditors and auction purchasers.

[7] R. M. Edwards, 'Mutiny Diary', 11 and 24 July 1857, IOL MSS Eur. C 148/1 and 2.

Far better to preserve order in their domain and see how larger political events shaped themselves.

Hence against all expectation the region remained quiet.

> . . . The mutiny brought insecurity and disorder, but on this side of the district comparative tranquillity prevailed, especially on the upland. . . . The great majority of the influential Sayyids remained on the side of order, the towns escaped from plunder, and the communities held their own. Here and there an unpopular Bania was robbed, or a Sayyid zemindar or lawless band of Gujars and Jats plundered hamlets or levied tribute, but this was more the case in the Ganges valley than in the upland. Confiscations were trifling in extent, aggregating only 2,635 acres in the whole tract east of the Kali, and loyal inhabitants of the eastern parganas were recompensed for their services by the grant of confiscated estates beyond the Hindun.[8]

Ensconced in the civil station with his dependable Gurkha force, Edwards was effectively equipped to impose order and re-establish district administration. The trickiest task was the collection of revenue, the *tahsildars* declaring that it was useless to make the attempt until the fate of Delhi had been decided. His efforts met nevertheless with remarkable success. By the end of August he had remitted nearly two and three-quarter lakhs to Meerut. His approach was one, however, of great caution. The huge uprising and consequent hasty withdrawal of the Khaki Risala from the Baraut pargana when Dunlop had attempted to combine revenue collection with a punitive expedition was not lost upon him. On 16 August Edwards was congratulating himself that he had already collected a lakh and a half 'peaceably, without having taken a single life or maltreated a single soul and consequently not inciting the fear and the feeling of the people against the Government. This is so different from what is being enacted elsewhere that it ought to procure me some credit from those in authority.'[9]

Edwards's policy of reasserting Government authority through revenue collection was necessarily one of gradualism, and meant leaving alone the more disaffected areas. On 16 July, the day the Khaki Risala set off for Baraut, he had had to send off a party of *sowars* under Daud Khan and of gaol guard sepoys under Ghaus Muhammad to Budhana 'to stop Shah Mull breaking into the district if he escapes from the Meerut expedition'.[10] It will be

8 Cadell, *Ganges Canal Tract*, pp. 28, 45.
9 R. M. Edwards, 'Mutiny Diary', 16 Aug. 1857, MSS Eur. C 148/2, f. 59^{v}.
10 Edwards, 'Diary', 16 July.

recalled (from the previous chapter) that on the withdrawal of the Khakis to Sardhana, Dunlop learned of a threatened attack on the town from a joint movement of Mawi Jats and Muslims gathered at Binauli who were acting in concert with others from Parasauli and Budhana in the Muzaffarnagar district. This came to nothing but led Edwards to adopt a policy of prudent abstention in interposing his authority in the Budhana region. On 28 July he recorded:

> Parts of the district are still disturbed but they are quarrelling with each other not the Government and I have steadily refused to interfere in favour of either side feeling certain that if they come to blows the conquered will come to me for aid and countenance and so I will have one party at all events on my side whereas were I to go at them now both would join against me. It is like interfering in a squabble between a man and wife. The portion of the district most disturbed is that which marches with Meerut where anarchy and rebellion have been for some time in the ascendant.

Edwards's record both in his private diary and the official Narrative of Events suffers from vagueness. He was in any event new to the district and freely admitted his lack of local knowledge. Hence the absence of informed detail and analysis concerning local internecine fights. The larger picture is, however, clear. There were three areas of disturbance. The first, of minor importance, was the Gujar-dominated Ganges *khadir*, especially the Gorhanpur pargana, from which it was feared there might be a movement to join up with the rebellious Gujar villages in the Bahsuma vicinity of the Meerut district. Dunlop had encouraged the Sayyid magnates to 'grapple with the Goojurs and possess themselves of their villages', an order which Edwards had felt necessary to modify to prevent provoking an unduly violent Gujar reaction.[11] In the event, Edwards had to exert himself very little; a detachment of twenty-five troopers under a civil officer, J. Palmer, carried out a punitive expedition in late July in the Ganges parganas and 'the depredations and excesses of the Goojurs were checked'.[12] The second area was the Shamli–Thana Bhawan region in the west. Edwards sent his other European subordinate, C. Grant, to Shamli on 14 July with a detachment of the 3rd Light Cavalry, the *tahsildar* of Shamli reporting 'the people to be in a restless unsatisfactory state of mind, and ready to break out into disturbance on slight pretence'.

[11] Edwards, 'Diary', 9 July, MSS Eur. C 148/2, f. 28^{v}.
[12] *NE* i. 357.

They were able to return in a fortnight bringing a small amount of revenue, the first it would seem that had been collected from the Shamli area since the crisis of early May. Despite these underground rumblings, the upsurge of rebellion was curiously long delayed. Matters were so quiet in early August that Edwards chafed at the flooded state of the country under the heavy monsoon which prevented him from moving out into the interior of the district.[13]

The area which had yet to be brought back under proper control presented the third and most serious source of disturbance—the border tract between Budhana and Kandhla on the south-west where it marched with the Barnawa pargana of Meerut. It contained not only Parasauli, from which trouble had threatened early, but also Jaula, a *tyul* or royal village belonging to the King of Delhi. Yet it was not until towards the end of August that large-scale rebellion took hold. It appears to have been touched off by a recrudescence of violence among the Jats of the Baraut pargana of Meerut. On 27 August the *thanadar* of Budhana reported to Edwards that a vast amount of plotting was going on and that disturbances would soon be renewed, that 'the people have now definitely settled to let their private quarrels remain in abeyance and no longer attack each other—but war solely against the Government: in the person of its servants'. There were rumours of Jat combinations in the border area. 'Shah Mull's nephew and [grand?]son are up and collecting men by the thousand.' A party of horsemen from Jaula and some foot soldiers from Delhi were said to have taken possession of Baraut, killed Dunlop's officials, and put in a new *tahsildar* on behalf of the King of Delhi.[14] No doubt they had been encouraged by the British confession of weakness when on a punitive raid on 13/14 August, the Khakis decided that it was too risky to cross the rain-swollen Kirsani and proceed with their plan to punish Banauli, Bijraul, and the other villages 'still excited to rebellion by Sujja and Bhugta', the nephew and grandson of Shah Mal.[15] Notwithstanding these reports, Edwards continued to press ahead with revenue collection, probably because the Commissioner thought his fears of an impending outbreak were exaggerated. Hence when the outbreak came, it bore the outward and immediate

[13] Edwards, 'Diary', 9 Aug.

[14] Edwards, 'Diary', 29 Aug. There are few other reports on this second rising at Baraut.

[15] *NE* i. 269.

signs of a tax rebellion. On 3 September, he learned that his men collecting revenue in the Budhana pargana had been attacked and driven out allegedly by *sowars* from Jaula who were in league with the Baraut rebels.

More seriously on 2 September a small cavalry detachment of twenty troopers directed by Grant from Shamli was repulsed from Parasauli, where they had gone to apprehend Khairati Khan, an old Pindari who was 'a shareholder in the village and a man of considerable influence', and who in his efforts to arouse resistance had allegedly made a visit to Delhi in an effort to obtain troops from the King.[16] The repulse at Parsauli resulted in a general concert of the disaffected, the villagers making common cause with Jaula. Khairati Khan's forces were joined not only by discontented elements from the surrounding part of the district but also from Baraut and Bijraul, the centre of Jat rebellion to the south. Together they ousted the police detachment from the fort at Budhana and took possession. For the British there was now a danger that this gathering of malcontents would coalesce with a great wave of disturbance among the Jat communities that had begun to roll northwards to Shamli. Until late August the peace in the Shamli area had been assured by the leading Jat landholder of the town, Mohur Singh, but he had then fallen out with the *tahsildar*, who accused him of being at heart a rebel and of dissuading the people from paying their revenue.[17] Hence when Edwards was reinforced at Muzaffarnagar on 27 August by fifty Gurkhas of the Nasiri battalion, he at once sent off Grant with a detachment of 3rd Cavalry to Shamli to look into the allegations. The result was inconclusive, but immediately he had been checked at Parasauli, Grant was in no doubt that an attack on Shamli from the Jats was imminent. So powerful were his representations that Edwards was induced to forgo his plan of striking first at Budhana, Parasauli, and Jaula and on 9 September proceeded instead direct to Shamli, having stripped the eastern parganas of the small cavalry detachments stationed at Miranpur and Pur.

On arrival he found a complex and baffling situation. Rebellion was springing up all around like dragon's teeth and the question was to decide which was the most pressing danger. Edwards first

[16] *NE* i. 358; Edwards, 'Diary', 5 Sept. 1857, MSS Eur. C 148/2, f. 77.

[17] Edwards states that after the recapture of Delhi petitions from Mohur Singh to the King were found in the Palace, *NE* i. 358.

struck to the north at the Rangar village of Hurhar which had been responsible for seizing some forty carts containing gums, dyes, bark, and sugar consigned to Shamli by merchants in Bhowani in the Rohtak district. It was during the unopposed occupation of the village that Edwards learned of the portentous Muslim outbreak at Thana Bhawan, headed by Enayat Ali, the nephew of the Qazi, Mahbub Ali Khan. This proved to be the most bloody and ferocious rising in the entire upper Doab. For the moment, however, Edwards was persuaded that the Jats constituted the more serious danger, although all immediate threat from them to Shamli had receded. On his first arrival in Shamli, he had found that 'the reports of the Jats' gatherings were constant, and there is no doubt that Khyratee Khan with Sujjah and Buktah, son and nephew of the famous Shah Mull of Bijroul purposed attacking in force'.[18] Yet the Jat advance had been frustrated by the Gujars who had assembled to oppose their passage through their villages. The failure of Khairati Khan and his allies to advance had in turn dissuaded other nearby villages from joining the movement of rebellion. Edwards was the first to acknowledge that his intelligence reports were imperfect and contradictory and that he himself knew very little about this part of the district. Once the Thana Bhawan rising had broken out he believed some initiative on his part essential; otherwise he would face 'a simultaneous attack from the Jats in the South and the Muhammedans in the North and may have to retire with a flooded river in our front and the loss of this place and indeed of the whole of this side of the district'.[19]

Persuaded that the Thana Bhawan rebels would not move for a week to ten days, Edwards determined on crushing the Jat rebellion in the south. The feat was performed quickly and with relative ease. Indeed there was no mass peasant mobilization to encounter. Edwards moved out of Shamli early on 14 September with the notion of retaking the fort at Budhana said to be held by 150 men, but they were attacked *en route* from the Muslim Rajput village of Jaula. In the fight that ensued the rebels left some 200 dead after Edwards's Gurkhas had carried the village at the point of the bayonet. When he reached Budhana it was to discover that the fort had been abandoned. From a political viewpoint Edwards was probably correct in judging that Jat disaffecting presented the most serious danger, but

[18] *NE* i. 359.
[19] Edwards, 'Diary', 13 Sept.

he had exaggerated their capacity to keep on foot an armed force ready for instant action. Consequently he appears to have had no more than the Rajput malcontents to encounter at Jaula. He quickly learned how he had also fatally misjudged the speed and weight of the threat from the Thana Bhawan rebels. In his absence from Shamli, the Thana Bhawan men had delivered a savage assault against the Shamli *tahsil* and overwhelmed it in pitiless slaughter.

The character of what was in many ways a bitter internecine conflict within the Muslim community will need examination, but it is the much more far-reaching movement of Jat unrest that commands historical importance. The details seem destined to remain obscure, but the ecology of the movement can be plotted.

Edwards later observed in his narrative report:

> Disaffection generally prevailed from the line of the Hindun going westward, including portions of the Pergunnahs of Boorhanah [Budhana], Shikarpoor, Bughra, and Churthawul, with the entire Pergunnah of Thannah Bhowun and the Jat villages of Shamlee; while the Candhlah Pergunnah, as far as the Jumna Canal, and part of Jhinjanah was also disturbed. Bodies of insurgents were collected at certain places throughout all these pergunnahs.[20]

Now the region west of the Hindan river was in 1857 easily the most productive and thriving part of the Muzaffarnagar district. That it was largely identified with the main area of Jat settlement was consequential on the historical fact that in their early migrations the Jats had possessed themselves of the finest soil tracts which lay for the most part in the south-western portion of the district. None of the towns was of any great size, being overgrown villages with a population of 10,000 or less, but they were larger than anything to be found in the rest of the district and, more importantly, those of Shamli and Kandhla were the centres of bustling activity for the movement of agricultural produce. The abundant surplus of wheat, sugar, cotton, and tobacco made its way on creaking bullock carts along the road from Shamli to Kairana, thence across the Jumna to the Punjab or to Delhi and Haryana. When Auckland Colvin visited the Kandhla pargana a few years after the disturbances, while it still bore obvious traces of the population decline consequent on the fighting and the famine of 1860, he was struck by the productive energy of the people:

[20] *NE* i. 360.

The map shows how closely the villages lie together, and the census shows a population of 409 to the square mile. But neither map nor census can give an accurate idea of the teeming life, the innumerable wheat fields, the long stretches of cane cultivation, the busy wells, the variety of [un-?]cultivated land, the prosperous stir of villages and agricultural towns.[21]

It was almost an article of faith with the British that this prosperity and the progress made over the previous forty years was the consequence of the opening of the Jumna Canal in 1830. Yet that progress was much less certain than in the adjacent Baraut pargana of Meerut district to the south, where by the mid-1860s the culturable waste had been diminished by a half in twenty years and the irrigated area more than doubled. In contrast, in Shamli and Thana Bhawan there had been no advance in the cultivated area. Only in Kandhla pargana was there an obvious progression in the doubling of the canal-irrigated zone. The bulk of Jat settlement lay to the east of the Kirsani river, an arable area which could not be reached by feeders from the canal and where the Jats were compelled to continue reliance on well irrigation. Tradition has it that the Kashyap *got* of Jats forming *khap* Baliyan took an active part in the 1857 uprising.[22] Their clan area was bounded by the Kirsani river on the west, the Shamli–Muzaffarnagar road on the north, an imaginary line joining Budhana and Khatauli on the south, and the Muzaffarnagar–Khatauli road on the east.

Although the portion west of the Hindan river figured in Edwards's area of disturbance, the main seats of agitation and violence lay outside it. They fell within the *khap* Gathwala of the Lal Jats, which roughly occupied the quadrilateral founded by Shamli, Kairana, Kandhla, and Husainpur on the Kirsani.[23] Yet whatever political pretensions the Jats may have asserted in the past in this area, they did not enjoy here the same solidity of settlement as they possessed east of the Kirsani. Around Kandhla itself, with its exceptionally fine soil, Jats held some sixteen villages on either side of the canal, compared with three held by Gujars, but north of

[21] Report by A. Colvin on settlement of Pargana Kandhla, 6 Jan. 1864, *Muzaffarnagar SR 1866*, p. 108, para. 19.

[22] Pradhan, *Political System of the Jats*, pp. 107–9. The tradition needs to be treated with extreme caution because of the manifest inaccuracies in which leadership of the Jat revolt is attributed not only to Nana Sahib but also to the Begam Samru who died in 1836(?).

[23] This information is derived entirely from the map supplied in the end covers of Pradhan, *Political System of the Jats*.

Kandhla, bordering on Shamli, Jats held only one village to the Gujars' ten. In Shamli pargana itself, the Jats were again more thickly settled, holding much of the narrow irrigated plain between the canal and the Kirsani. The interspersing of Jat and Gujar settlement made little difference to the economics of agriculture. 'In this tract [of Shamli and Thana Bhawan parganas], as in Kandlah, the Jats, and close behind them the reclaimed Gujars have worked with an energy which has left nearly all other classes far behind', wrote Colvin in 1864. Yet there was not the same sense of security which solid settlement provided. Broadly speaking the region west of the Hindan contrasted vividly with the eastern parganas in the low turnover of land titles and the relatively low incidence of mortgage and agrarian indebtedness. In Budhana pargana, for example, only one-eleventh of the area changed hands between 1840 and 1860. The same was true in large measure of the other parganas of the *tahsil*; there had been fewest transfers where village cultivating communities predominated.[24] All this followed the broad pattern to be observed in the Meerut district in the south and its contrast between the eastern and western parts of the district. Yet in the most prosperous of the Muzaffarngar parganas, Kandhla, Auckland Colvin was able to observe by 1860 the signs of a struggle for land control and evidence of the displacement of Jat proprietary groups by *banias*. Indeed it supplied one of the rare instances where actual physical eviction of the original cultivators was observed and their replacement by the new moneylender landlords with Mali or Chamar labourers.[25] If the Jats in Kandhla felt the threat of dispossession by moneyed men, and their agricultural and political primacy challenged—indeed their intended march on Shamli in September 1857 blocked—by reformed Gujars, there were other indications that they had not fully accommodated themselves to the *pax Britannica* despite its apparent material benefits.

Their villages reached across the Kirsani stream and joined up with a group of Jat villages in the Budhana pargana which abutted on to the Rajput and Rangar villages of Jaula, Parasauli, and Kuralsi on the north and west. In 1855 an official inquiry was set on foot into the activities of a so-called criminal tribe—the Boureahs—harboured by villagers in the Muzaffarnagar as well as neighbour-

[24] Atkinson, *Gaz.* iii. 557.

[25] Colvin, Report on settlement of Pargana Kandhla, 8 Jan. 1864, para. 12, p. 107 in *Muzaffarnagar SR 1874*.

ing districts. During the cold season the Boureahs set off after rituals reminiscent of the thugs to carry out robberies in the central Doab, extending as far afield as Benares, Hyderabad, and Bombay. The main culprits were a contiguous group of some ten or eleven villages, the most numerous of which were Jat villages east of the Kirsani, like Banehra and Dungar. The Boureahs had lain up in this area for generations and had the local police and *thanadars* in their pay. As long ago as 1839 one of their number, Dhokal Singh, had claimed that the *thanadars* of Baghpat, Muradnagar, and Baraut in the Meerut district and Kandhla in Muzaffarnagar district had been brought over to their interests. The existence of the Boureahs was known to European officials, but so long as they committed their robberies well away from the district, there did not seem much that could be done with a group estimated to number with their wives and families some 1,300 persons. The reasons for official action and inquiry in 1855 were an infraction of the Boureah rule of robbing outside the district and dissension among villagers who profited from harbouring them. In July 1854 the *zamindars* of Parasauli had complained about Boureah robberies from Haria Khera and Husseinpur, while in September 1853 there had been a petition from some of the landholders in Baral, a Rajput village, about the presence of Boureahs. Baral was their oldest hideout, and one of the leading *zamindars*, Achpal Singh, had grown rich on their presence. Sheikh Khair-ud-din Ahmad, a specially deputed *tahsildar*, said Achpal Singh had inherited five villages from his father and had acquired eleven more; he was 'building a puckah kotee [big house] in the English fashion, which I have seen for myself, and he is the richest zamindar in that pergunnah'.[26] Achpal Singh was too big a fish to catch, having carefully disposed of his loot of silver maces and staffs of office, shawls, and gold and silver ornaments. But in April and May 1855, some twenty-two persons from nine villages, including Bunhera, Baral, Haria Khera, Dangur, Surnauli, and Chajpur, were given sentences of between three and six months' imprisonment. Many of these villages were Jat. The prison sentences must have rubbed salt into the wound caused by the sudden clamping down on this lucrative protection racket. By August 1855, the Meerut commissioner, H. H. Greathed, could report that out of the 1,300 Boureahs in Muzaffarnagar district, only 132 females

26 'Boureah Gangs in Muzaffarnagar', *Sels. Recs. Govt. NWP*, art. ii, pt. xxii (Agra, 1856), p. 120.

remained. The remainder had been tipped off in time and taken flight.

The Jats somewhat to the north in the Shamli region had more deep-seated problems to contend with. After 1830 they had been among the beneficiaries of the opening of the East Jumna Canal, whose distributary channels had been run briefly eastward until stopped short by the bed of the Kirsani. Baird Smith in his celebrated famine report of 1861 noted how the introduction of canal irrigation upset existing fiscal and proprietary relationships, but in Shamli it introduced more insidious evils. As early as 1843 a wave of malarial fever starting in Karbal on the other side of the Jumna swept the district and prompted an official inquiry. No positive conclusions of the connection with the canal irrigation could be adduced, but the British cantonment was removed from Karnal to Ambala. For twenty miles north of Shamli, the winding bed of the Shamli Nadi had been used for the East Jumna Canal instead of an artificially constructed channel. It was this natural watercourse which received the mass of silt swept down by reason of the excessive fall of the Canal in its upper reaches.

As the silt steadily raised the level of the canal bed, the banks had in turn to be raised. The result was the creation of 'a dense mass of reeds and rank vegetation and a pestilential marsh' on either side of this section of the Canal. In 1854 a new line of canal was constructed to replace the use of the Shamli Nadi, but it appears to have created fresh problems on the west side and failed to improve the swamp-ridden area. As late as 1868 a medical officer of health could report that Bhainswal was 'doubtless a nice place for animals of the reptilian period, but wholly unfitted to be inhabited by man'. Shamli he reported as 'second only to Bhynswal in unhealthiness' and the townspeople 'thin, ill, pallid, cadaverous, listless and depressed'. As along the West Jumna Canal the men were full of complaints of impotency.[27]

Cadell blamed the abuse of unduly cheap canal water for much of the trouble when he looked into the feasibility of a permanent settlement of the land revenue in 1865. He was startled at the fact

[27] *Notes on the Level of the East Jumna Canal* (Agra, 1853), p. 13; 'Katha Nudee and the Swamps in its Valley', *Sels. Recs. Govt. NWP*, vol. vi, No. 3, art. xxiii (Allahabad, 1873), pp. 492, 498; 'Drainage and Improvement of Saharanpore and Moozuffernuggur Districts', *Sels. Recs. Govt. NWP*, vol. vi, No. 2, art. viii (Allahabad, 1872), p. 226; H. C. Cutliffe, *A Sanitary Report on Certain Districts in the Meerut Division* (Allahabad, 1868), p. 17.

that the Jats in the tract irrigated with well water east of the Kirsani were paying a higher revenue rate than their caste-mates west of the stream enjoying the advantages of canal water. But here he acknowledged that 'over-irrigation has done its deadly work. The land is slowly but steadily deteriorating, and malaria has enfeebled the population.'[28] The 'dry' tract of Shamli pargana that lay eastward of the Kirsani and continued into the contiguous pargana of Shikapur up to the Hindan river was splendidly farmed, but the high revenue rate of Rs. 2-10-11 on the cultivated acre doubtless supplied the same sense of grievance at their differential disadvantage with the more lowly-assessed canal-irrigated tracts.

Even in Baraut pargana where the canal brought no unhealthiness[29] it still brought in its train the problems of a potentially oppressive and corrupt petty officialdom, disputes over the charging of costs of the distributary channels and the levying of Chamar labour for canal construction work. In Muzaffarnagar it was noted that since canal rights were transferable, a village *zamindar* could buy up one or two outlets and secure irrigation in a village in which there had been no intention of any general extension of canal irrigation. It underlined how much the new facility could be a sharp element of disturbance, increasing cash-cropping opportunities for some, while impoverishing and enfeebling others, altering accepted caste relationships, and bringing into the rural domain a massive increase in petty governmental authority. Hence, while a region like the western portion of Meerut division may well have enjoyed an overall increase in wealth and combated successfully the general enroachment of outside moneyed elements in land control arrangements, that did not mean that there was necessarily a general increase in the level of social contentment.

Political violence is not, however, the product of predisposing circumstances but of specific causes. Here political leadership played an independent role. Peasant movements, it is well known, tend to look for outside leadership, for men of larger horizons and experience beyond the village confines. It is noticeable that the Jats appear to have rallied upon Khairati Khan, the old Pindari freebooter,[30] rather than relied purely on their own resources and

28 'Report of Permanent Settlement of Western Pergunnahs of Muzaffarnagar District', p. 47, in *Muzaffarnagar SR 1873.*

29 Cutliffe, *Sanitary Report*, p. 18.

30 'This man is a Mahratta possessed of all the skill, energy and fearlessness of the old Pindaree. He is of advanced age and a leper.' List of persons eminent for disloyalty in Meerut Division, NWP Pol. Progs., Dec. 1858, No. 208.

leaders. Personal rivalries and ambitions occasioned and shaped actual violence. Jat disaffection in the Shamli area was touched off by the contest for influence and authority between the Jat notable, Mohur Singh, and the *tahsildar*, Ibrahim Khan. Mohur Singh was too circumspect to go into open rebellion, and sent Edwards word of the attack on Shamli, though Edwards continued to suspect his motives. A missive to the King alleged to be from Mohur Singh was found in the Palace at Delhi. In this he entreated the aid of troops, promising that he would send the heads of the two Europeans then at Shamli to the King and all the money in the *tahsil* to the Royal Treasure.[31] He was later charged with bringing about the attack and was executed.

The timing and the ferocity of the attack on the Shamli *tahsil* compound was also determined by intense personal and group rivalries among the local Muslim community, but again it would be well to look first at their general setting. In Thana Bhawan pargana Jat cultivation gradually gave way as one moved north from Shamli to predominantly Rajput or Rangar villages, while across the whole pargana ran a line of revenue-free villages held by Sheikh, Baluch, and Maratha *muafidars* (revenue-free holders). Between the East Jumna Canal and the Kirsani on the east the plain was thickly settled and yielded good harvests of wheat and rice; east of the Kirsani, where the large village of Loharu was situated, the Rajputs worked a dry, sparsely inhabited tract. Yet the damage from faulty alignment and over-lavish use of cheap irrigation facilities had the effect of steadily putting more land out of cultivation near the Canal, the sterile white efflorescence termed *reh* also extending the area of damage.[32] Colvin in 1864 found the Rajputs 'a violent quarrelsome set of men, bad subjects and bad neighbours'. But it was the Sheikh, Turkaman, and Baluchi grantees existing on petty revenue-free grants and refusing to soil their hands with manual labour who presented the real source of political disaffection. They were gathered in a congeries of small *qasbahs* or townships which spilled over the district border northwards to Lakmati, Nanauta, and Gangoh in the Saharanpur district. A form of historical deposit more familiar to the Rohilkhand districts of Bareilly and

[31] List of persons eminent for disloyalty in Meerut Division, NWP Pol. Progs., Dec. 1858, No. 208.

[32] Cadell, Rep. Perm. Settlement; Atkinson, *Gaz.* iii. 737; Colvin, Rep. 8 Jan. 1864 in *Muzaffarnagar SR 1866*, p. 130.

Shahjahanpur, they represented the vestiges of petty fiscal lordships like Tappa Kaini which before the deaths of the Turkaman chief, Barmand Ali Khan, had consisted of twenty-one villages near Gangoh. In the south, the Muslim *qasbah* Thana Bhawan was flanked by Jalalabad on the north and across the Kirsani, Lohari on the east. For long the dominant Muslim notable had been the Qazi of Thana Bhawan. At the British occupation in 1803, the Qazi Najabat Ali Khan was made a *tahsildar* until popular outcry against his abuses led to his dismissal.[33] He remained an active purchaser of the title deeds of dispossessed revenue assignees, and was much feared. His son, Mahbub Ali Khan, inherited his estate and reputation. In 1848 he was suing Belos Rai, who had been in his father's service, for the registration of the transfer of the village of Hassanpur Lotini. Belos Rai denied the concealed sale of 1841, but in 1848 Mahbub Ali had persuaded some of the tenants to bring their rents to him 'as he is a very powerful and influential person in the town and neighbourhood'.[34] The Principal Sadr Amin of Saharanpur had decreed in Mahbub Ali's favour, but the District Judge, G. F. Franco, reversed the decision partly on the grounds that 'the plaintiff is a well known person of great influence and there are not very many who are disinterested in the case would give voluntarily evidence against him'. Inevitably the Qazi's power bred jealousy and rivalry especially among other Muslim notables. He later said himself that the moneylenders of the town bore him an old grudge, so that when he was called upon to pay his revenue after the first tumults of the military outbreak in 1857 had subsided, he was refused credit. It was the dispatch of his son, Abdur Rahim, purportedly to raise a loan from Kanahiya Lal Sahukar at Saharanpur, followed by the latter's arrest and execution, that touched off the rebellion in Thana Bhawan led by Inayat Ali Khan.

This was an affair of much complexity in which the British were unable to implicate the Qazi directly. When in 1858 he petitioned against the confiscation of his property, Edwards could draw up only a circumstantial indictment against him. At the commencement of disturbances, when the *rais* of Jalalabad, Lohari, and Jhinjana had presented themselves to the authorities and tendered aid, the Qazi had held aloof. He and his people, Edwards alleged, called

[33] Atkinson, *Gaz.* iii. 735.

[34] Zillah Court Decisions NWP, 1848, Delhi, Saharanpur, Meerut, Alygurh, pp. 114–15. Mahbub Ali Khan v. Belos Rae.

in the Jullunder mutineers and feasted them *en route*. The disaffection of the Qazi had been well known; Edwards had received more than one letter from Spankie, the Collector of Saharanpur, directing him to arrest the Qazi, but he had lacked the requisite force.[35] The only reason that the Qazi had not joined Inayat Ali in open revolt was the refusal of the *rais* of Jalalabad and Lohari to join him, so that he had thought it politic to withdraw to Delhi, which he was making for when the British recaptured it. The division of Muslim notables was, in fact, a good deal less simple than this. On 9 July Edwards recorded in his diary that Aftab Ali Khan of Jalalabad had come in person to complain of the Lohari men having looted his wife's property and shot his brother. Aftab Ali had also accused Sadullah Khan, who owned half Lohari, of sending his nephew, Abdul Dari Khan, to the King at Delhi offering his services. Yet Sadullah Khan managed to come out on the right side, however much at first he tried double-dealing as a form of insurance. Later there was suspicion that Sadullah had deliberately failed to send a warning to Edwards of the intended attack on Shamli, but Edwards later said he was satisfied that the message was intercepted.[36] Sadullah was duly rewarded because of the material help he gave in sending *sowars* to reinforce the Shamli *tahsil* when it came under threat. But his nephew, 'Nawab' Ahmad Ali Khan, a beardless youth of eighteen, who held the other half-share of Lohari, was damned as one of the most committed of rebels. The *rais* of Jalalabad also revealed strains and fissures in the loyal front they decided to put up to the British, Aftab Ali, as we have seen, evincing extreme jealousy of Sadullah Khan of Lohari. Muhammad Ali, the son of Mansur Ali Khan, the acknowledged leader of the Jalalabad *rais*, was appointed *tahsildar* of Thana Bhawan after the outbreak there, but this surrender of office to men of local influence, cutting across the earlier 'civil service' tradition went down ill with Bakhtawar Singh, the former career *tahsildar*. As a result, Aftab Ali, who had been appointed agent to aid in the revenue collection, achieved only partial success.[37]

[35] Petition by Qazi Mahboob Ali Khan, 11 Dec. 1858; UP State Archives, Allahabad, Post-Mutiny Records Com. (Meerut), Dept. xii, Revenue, File 50/1859. Also, R. M. Edwards to F. Williams, 21 Oct. 1859, *idem*.

[36] Edwards to Williams, 1 Sept. 1858; *idem*, File 32/1858.

[37] F. Williams, Statement of rewards proposed in Meerut Division, 20 Nov. 1858; NWP Pol. Progs., Jan. 1858, No. 255 (Range 230/86). Also, Edwards to Williams, 30 Dec. 1857; UP State Archives Com. (Meerut), Dept. xii, Special, File 37/1858.

Inayat Ali's rising was far from being a purely Muslim or a purely local affair. Among those listed as eminent for disloyalty were Humincha Singh, Rajput *zamindar* of Thana Bhawan, and 'Nawal Rajpoot', who were both said to have played a prominent part and joined in the massacre at Shamli. The British saw the decision for rebellion in political terms, and put down a great deal to the influence of Sheikh Ahmad of Thana Bhawan, a *munsif* in Moradabad district (one source says *munsif* of Tilhur in Shajahanpur district). A 'very clever' man some fifty years old, he is supposed to have been the *éminence grise* who 'greatly fomented rebellion, pointing out to the young Cazee the success of the Mohamedans in Rohilkhund and that a like issue would attend his efforts and the English be expelled from the Doab'.[38] But the information against him was supplied by his enemies, Mansur Ali Khan and Muhammad Ali Khan of Jalalabad, who said Sheikh Ahmad, finding letters of no avail, came himself to Jalalabad to urge the *rais* to join the rebel cause and threatened a repetition of the Shamli massacre if they declined.

Yet there is a much more strictly religious interpretation of the rising by members of the celebrated Deoband School which in a sense was born from the ashes of the Thana Bhawan rising. According to the *Naqsh-i-Hayat*, which makes no mention even of Inayat Ali Khan, there were three leading *ulama* in Thana Bhawan, Hafiz Zamin Sahib, Haji Imdadullah, and Maulana Sheikh Muhammad Sahib. The last was regarded as the authority on Muslim law, and his *fatwa* (pronouncement) had been delivered denouncing rebellion against British rule as unlawful. When this was questioned by the others, Maulana Rashid Ahmad Sahib of Gangoh and Maulana Muhammad Qasim Sahib of Nanauta were sent for, and Sheikh Muhammad was overruled. Imdadullah was then appointed Iman, Muhammad Qasim commander-in-chief, and Rashid Ahmad Qazi. There is this much to be said for an interpretation which lodges the leadership entirely in spiritual hands. When Mahbub Ali petitioned against

F. Williams, List of persons eminent for disloyalty in Meerut Division, 24 Nov. 1858; NWP Pol. Progs., Dec. 1858, No. 208.

[38] R. M. Edwards to F. Williams, 21 Oct. 1859; UP State Archives, Post-Mutiny Records Com. (Meerut), Dept. xii, Rev., File 48/1859. Presumably Mahbub Ali Khan is still meant by 'the young Cazee', but he was thought to be 40 years old and his hair 'sprinkled with grey' (List of persons eminent for disloyalty). The rebels are said to have made Maulana Rashid Ahmad Sahib Gangohi the Qazi, presumably after Mahbub Ali's departure; *Naqsh-i-Hayat*, ii. 42–4.

confiscation of his property by denying all connection with Inayat Ullah's rebellion, he ascribed the chief influence over Inayat Ali to Haji Imdadullah and Hafiz Zamin, and claimed that he had won over to the side opposing rebellion Sheikh Ahmad, Maulavi Sheikh Muhammad, Maulavi Abdur Rahman, and Ahmad Ali among others.

The internal divisions within Muslim ranks took on their bloodiest hue at Shamli. The *tahsildar* who upheld British authority, Muhammad Ibrahim Khan, was not content with the scratch force supplied to him but recruited some fifty members and retainers of his family from Rampur to strengthen his position.[39] The split within the Muslim service families was sharp and deep, since it will be recalled that Inayat Ali had on his side the *munsif*, Sheikh Ahmad, as well as Muhammad Hussein Sheikh, formerly *kotwal* of Jawalapur in Saharanpur district. At the level of *tahsildar*, there were, of course, few significant defections; only in the Pathan-dominated district of Bareilly were the subordinate government servants prepared to continue in employment under the rebel regime in large numbers, five of the nine *tahsildars* openly changing allegiance.[40] But the judicial officers and the lower office establishment proved much more fertile recruiting ground for the cause of rebellion. The bitterness of the struggle at Shamli, with no white man present, appalled Edwards:

> The ferocity of the Muhamedans against Government servants was shown at Shamlee by their slaughtering all who fled into the Musjeed [mosque] which has always hitherto been deemed a sanctuary. They were there brutally murdered, the inner walls of the Musjid and Shewalah [temple] were crimsoned with blood.[41]

Despite the considerable number of men Ibrahim Khan had at his disposal, they were kept cooped up in the *tahsil* compound, and were slaughtered almost to a man when Inayat Ali's force (said to have numbered 3,000 men with two guns)[42] broke in. One hundred and thirteen were counted among the slain. The town was left unharmed, leading to a strong suspicion of collusion. The British

[39] *An Account of the Loyal Mahomedans of India* (by Sayyid Ahmad Khan), part 1 (Meerut, 1860). (IOL Tract 579)

[40] *NE* i. 392.

[41] Edwards, 'Diary', 11 Oct. 1857. Cf. *NE* i. 362.

[42] W. Malcolm Low, Memo (Oct. 1857), cited U. Low, *Fifty Years with 'John Company'* (London, 1936), p. 380.

chose to believe that it was Mohur Singh who had persuaded the leading Jat *zamindar* of Shamli, Inayat Ali, to attack the Shamli *tahsil* offices, and had him executed for the offence. But there were others ready to lend a hand. Bakhtawar Singh, the Thana Bhawan *tahsildar* (also killed in the Shamli fight) had warned Edwards of the danger of alienating all the Rangar villages when he had decided to go at Harbar. Edwards had dismissed him as a timid creature, but it was later deemed necessary to destroy 'the villages of Hurhar [Fatehpur Harhar], Herudh [Hind], and Sikkah [Sikka], which had been the leaders of the attack on the Shamlee Tehseel'.[43] As Fleetwood Williams, the Commissioner, stated, it was 'an extensive Mahomedan insurrection, in which all the plundering tribes of the neighbourhood joined'.

In this way a large number of elements of rural disturbance came together in the Shamli affair. That the Gujar canal villages had blocked the northward advance of Jat activists merely displayed the equivocal role the more violent groups could play. For in the early stages, the wild Gujars who held the untilled waste making up much of Bidauli, Jhanjana, and Kairana had, like the Muslim Rangars about Thana Bhawan, represented a threat to urban property that all notables felt it politic to counter. The British did not deny that Mohur Singh had done valuable work in preserving order in Shamli, just as they acknowledged that the Qazi of Thana Bhawan was instrumental in organizing the defence of the town against a horde of dacoits. Despite the fact that the elements making for violence could never be brought together at the same moment on the historical stage, and often counteracted one another, the degree of concert achieved at Shamli represented a movement of rural rebellion covering a wide tract of country. Had not Shamli fallen shortly afterwards to the British, they would have had a serious fight on their hands. This was because Edwards determined that the signal disaster to Government prestige at Shamli while he was absent at Budhana needed to be quickly avenged. On 19 September he accompanied a force of some 80 Gurkhas and 100 Sikhs with two mountain guns in an attempt to extirpate rebellion at Thana Bhawan. But he had reckoned without the natural strength of the walled town, the untried nature of many of the troops, and the high officer casualties incurred in urging them forward. The force was compelled to retreat before the fierce resistance it

[43] *NE* i. 245, 364.

encountered.[44] Ultimately the Khaki Risala had to be brought over by forced marches, but when they arrived before the town on 24 September they found it evacuated. For already British officers were dining in the marble halls of the Palace at Delhi, and the futility and danger of resistance in the Upper Doab was plain. Inayat Ali made off for Rohilkhand.

The ferocity and resolution with which the rebels fought at Thana Bhawan and their capacity to resist regular troops with artillery put them in a different category from the armed concourses of peasants under Shah Mal or Khairati Khan. Hence the reputation of Islam as the true heart and soul of the revolt against infidel rule. Certainly the green flag and the Muslim battle cry lent an ideological and religious tone absent from other rural disturbances, except perhaps in Awadh. Yet Muslims on examination were as divided in their response to the 1857 crisis as any other social group. Edwards was impressed by the manner in which at Shamli the Muslim troopers of the 1st Punjab Cavalry had spurned the cry of the faith and the appeal of the green flag and had gone down fighting their co-religionists to the last.[45]

What was significant and different about the Thana Bhawan rising was that it was the work of a petty gentry class eking out a living from much partitioned *muafi* (revenue-free) holdings. They had not thrown up men of sufficient influence or stake in the existing order to keep them quiet in the way the Sayyid service gentry succeeded in doing in the eastern portion of the district. Yet it has to be admitted that the Thana Bhawan rising did not occur until September 1857 and then only after the execution of the Qazi's nephew at Saharanpur. Yet over the border to the north in the area of Saharanpur district that marched with Thana Bhawan pargana, where the Muslim gentry was poorer and peasant movements more militant, violence came much earlier in the day.

[44] Cf. W. Malcolm Low, cited Low, *Fifty Years*, pp. 381–2.

[45] *NE* I. 362.

7

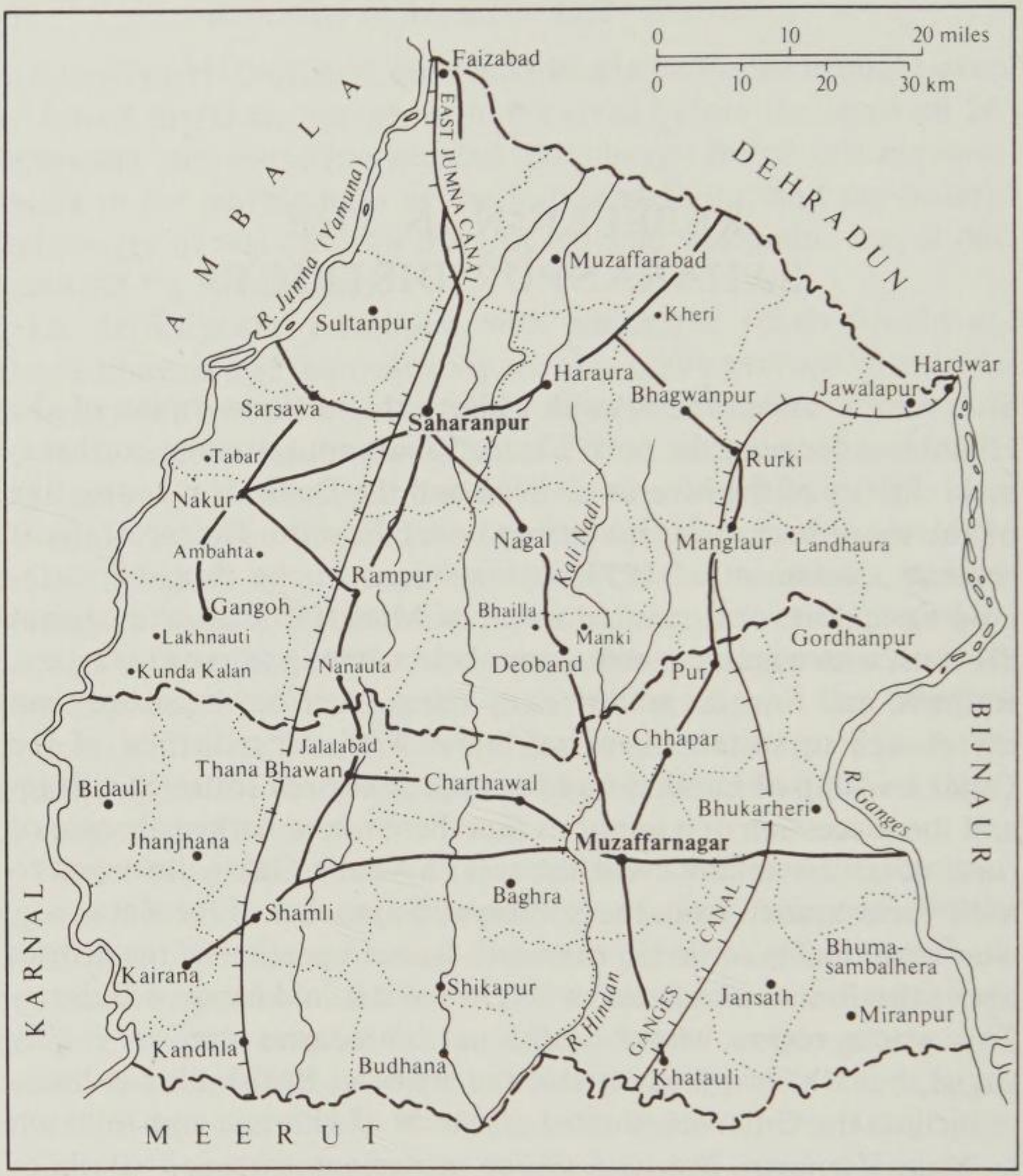
REBELLION IN THE SAHARANPUR DISTRICT

SHELTERING under the Siwalik Hills with the snow range of the Himalayas forming the far horizon, Saharanpur was the northern-most district of the Meerut division and the Doab. It was also one of the more backward, labouring under Edward Thornton's stiff revenue assessment of 1838, lacking signs of the thrusting cash-crop agriculture that marked much of Muzaffarnagar and Meerut districts, with a heterogeneous population among whom the Gujars, Rajputs, and Rangars traditionally relied more on the sword than the plough to sustain their position.[1] With the reduction of the Gujar lordship of Landhaura to a couple of dozen scattered villages and the succession of a minor as raja there was a marked absence of rural notables. In any event the raja, a Khaba Gujar, belonged to a different branch from the dominant Gujar clan of the Batar *got*, who were thickly settled in the south-western portion of the district above the Jumna *khadir* and who gave to it its old name of Gujarat. This was a region whose traditional boundaries were inevitably vague, but which spilled outside the artificial British district limits to include the Gujar-dominated parganas of Hairana and Jhinjana in Muzaffarnagar district.[2] Gujar settlement extended south of Saharanpur city as far eastward as Deoband and the Kali Nadi stream, but was interrupted on the west of Deoband by a group of some twenty-three villages held by Pundir Rajputs who had 'long been notorious for turbulence and contempt of all authority'.[3]

Strangely for a comparatively backward district where rental payments remained in kind and little significant economic distinction existed between 'proprietary' and 'non-proprietary' cultivators, the non-agricultural classes had made significant inroads into landholding. Now this feature is of such a distinctive nature

[1] *Saharanpur SR 1870*, App., p. 11. [2] Elliot, *Memoirs*, i. 100.

[3] R. Spankie to Commissioner Meerut, 11 Mar. 1858; UP State Archives, Allahabad. Saharanpur Collectorate Pre-Mutiny Records, Bk. 230, ser. ii. 4. Judicial Letters issued to the Commr., May 1856–Oct. 1858.



4. Saharanpur and Muzaffarnagar Districts

and played such a large part even in contemporary understanding of the peasant disturbances in Saharanpur district that it deserves some preliminary consideration. By 1868—the earliest date for holdings by caste—some 18 per cent of the land had passed to the moneyed classes loosely designated by the revenue officials as *mahajans*. But there was enormous variation within the district, a submountain pargana where, like Muzaffarabad, 'capitalists' had taken up clearing jungle grants recording some 39 per cent of land as *mahajan*-owned, and an eastern pargana like Manglaur only 3 per cent. Most of the transfers had occurred before 1857.[4] In 1855 in response to an official inquiry on the frequency of pro-

[4] Figures calculated in table, Stokes, *Peasant and the Raj*, p. 162.

prietary transfers, A. Ross, the Collector of Saharanpur, spoke of 'the extreme eagerness to acquire land on the part of the mahajuns, or money-lending class, who are to be found in almost every village . . . The unjust and fraudulent spoliation thus alleged to be committed through the instrumentality of the Civil Court is the theme of loud and constant complaint among the agricultural class.'[5] Le Poer Wynne, the settlement officer in the mid-1860s, placed responsibility with 'the large moneylenders who congregate in the various towns'. They made their profits by raising rents and reducing all tenants to a common level. As landlords they were invariably absentee and managed their estates through agents. Wynne described the gradual methods by which the moneylender acquired proprietary title in the Saharanpur *tahsil*. The ordinary improvident *zamindar* found difficulty in meeting the fixed demand of the Government, however moderate, and a bad season or mortality among the cattle would force him to borrow, interest payments being met in grain at the next harvest. Soon the peasant was irretrievably involved:

> ... if not, the mahajan does not hurry matters, and does not begin to land his fish until securely hooked. When he finds this is the case, he first obtains possession of a small share of the village, still keeping the proprietors of the remainder in his debt. By degrees the whole estate falls into his hands and the old owners become his cultivators, and often are at last ejected altogether.[6]

It was an *idée fixe* at this time among many British officials that the moneylender was bent on acquiring landed dominion, and Agnew, like Colvin about the same time in Kandhla pargana of Muzaffarnagar district, speaks of this going so far as the ultimate ejection of the original proprietors from their lands. It is true that moneyed men had been active to some degree in taking up the Government offers of jungle grants. By 1854 nearly 110,000 acres had 'been given on the most remunerative terms to enterprising men who have reaped and are reaping a rich reward'. Some 38,000 acres of this had been brought under tillage by 1854, more than half being brought under the plough since 1847/48.[7] The movement

[5] A. Ross, 10 Mar. 1855, cited *Saharanpur SR 1870*, App., p. 11.

[6] J. Vans Agnew, 7 Feb. 1861; *NWP Unrepealed Circular Orders of the Board of Revenue from 1848*, part 1 (Allahabad, 1869), p. 51.

[7] J. Craigie, Collr. Saharanpur, to Commr. Meerut, 22 June 1854; NWP Rev. Progs., 5 May 1854, No. 36 (P/220/33).

may possibly have strengthened the idea of reaping high rental and moneylending returns by locating low-caste cultivators on land where 'the sturdy Rajputs and Gujars' did not exist or could be effectively dispossessed, for these notoriously best resisted the moneylender's advances. In fact the most dramatic inroads were made by moneylending interests in the Saharanpur *tahsil* (comprising parganas Saharanpur, Haraura, Muzaffarabad, and Faizabad). When W. Muir, the Lieutenant-Governor, visited the Meerut division in 1860, he was so alarmed at the extent of transfers in the *tahsil* that the whole question of prohibiting the sale of land in execution of decrees of court for mortgage and debt was raised as a general issue. The revised return showed that the average transfer rate (including mortgage) in each pargana of the *tahsil* over the twenty-year period of the 1839–59 settlement was 44 per cent compared with an average for the district of 26 per cent. The only other parganas with anything like this high rate were Sultanpur (37 per cent) and Sirsawa (34 per cent). These lay adjacent, and together the six parganas marked off the outline of the north-west quarter of the district.

Alienation of land to the moneylending trading classes was a more complex phenomenon than British officials supposed. Normally the acquisition of *malguzari* rights involved too great a commitment of capital and too large a problem of management and collection of rents. In most of India the large-scale movement of the trader into land ownership was more often the signal of distress when as a result of crop-failure the peasantry was obliged to default extensively on its loan payments and the moneylending mortgages foreclosed in order to assure himself at least of the normal *malguzari* profit on the revenue demand. The exceptions would be where the revenue demand was low and management easy, representing a high rate of return. The *malguzari* right could be a profitable capital asset where its value was more than five times the annual revenue demand. In the Sarhanpur *tahsil* in 1861, it was estimated that land was changing hands by private sale and by compulsory court decrees at six and a half times the demand. The *tahsil* 'was generally acknowledged to be under-assessed'. There were three other elements making for these relatively high average prices. The first was the prospective return on jungle grants in Faizabad and Muzaffarabad parganas, in each of which *mahajans* held eleven villages (although these were not all jungle grants). The

second was the profitability of land irrigated from the East Jumna Canal and growing valuable crops like rice. The third was the well-known phenomenon of high land prices in the immediate vicinity of a district town. In the garden cultivation close to Saharanpur, city rents ran as high as Rs. 80 to Rs. 100 an acre, when H. D. Robertson settled the Saharanpur pargana in 1866.[8]

The rapid intrusion of moneylenders into landholding was often the historical mark of a backward region brought rapidly into contact with commercialized agriculture. The north-western quarter of the district was certainly the most advanced and had undergone some measure of agricultural development towards cash crops. One of the more flourishing parganas was Haraura, to the east of Saharanpur, despite the fact that it enjoyed no canal water and had only 19 per cent of the cultivation irrigated from wells. But the naturally good soil enabled it to bear the most extensive sugar-crop of any pargana. The other parganas in the *tahsil* benefited from the East Jumna Canal, although only the head pargana did so to any very large extent. The cultivating and proprietary community was extremely mixed with a wide variety of castes. Only half the villages were held by single caste groups. Gujars were noticeable by their absence except in Saharanpur pargana. These conditions appeared to favour extensive land transfers, but it must be admitted that the volume of land acquisition by moneylenders fell far below the rate of transfer. For example, in Saharanpur pargana, moneylenders had acquired by 1868 19 per cent of the land compared with a transfer rate during the period of Thornton's settlement (1839–59) of 48 percent. In Muzaffarabad, however, it was noted that 'most of the estates belong to mahajuns living in Saharunpore'; in fact their holding amounted to some 40 per cent, compared with an earlier transfer rate of 48 per cent.

Conditions in the adjoining parganas of Sultanpur and Sirsawa fill out this picture. When Wynne looked at Sultanpur in the mid-1860s, he found that in the canal-irrigated villages 'the principal owners of the land are Mahajuns' and in the smaller mixed *bangar* and *khadir* tract the rent-rates were high owing to 'the rack-renting tendencies of the Sooltanpore Mahajuns (who own a large portion of the land)'. But again both these tracts had very mixed populations. In the much larger *khadir* tract, where much of the

[8] Resolution of Government, 8 Apr. 1875, p. 4, in *Saharanpur SR 1870.* Also *idem*, pp. 170, 34.

alluvial land of the Jumna bed was highly fertile, Gujars—both Hindu and Muslim—were solidly settled and held over half the land, while moneylenders were down to under a quarter. Wynne reported the Gujars as 'extremely well-to-do, and very fairly industrious'. As he proceeded southwards, the poorer became the character of the cultivation, especially on the part of the Gujars. This was true of the Sirsawa pargana, even with Gujars in the relatively small number of canal-irrigated villages who were 'decidedly less industrious and less well-to-do than in the corresponding group in Sooltanpoor'.

Excluding, therefore, Sirsawa pargana as a transition zone, the north-west quartile of the district may be regarded as a zone where conditions were favourable for the development of cash-crop farming in the more valuable products of rice, sugar, cotton, and wheat. The moneyed men resident in Sarahanpur and the smaller towns of Sultanpur and Sirsawa appear to have been active in promoting the movement by themselves buying up *malguzari* titles and managing their 'estates' through agents. Rental profit may have been partly the object, but closer control of the cropping pattern and the marketing of produce could also have been important. Easy communication with the Punjab through Ambala, and the existence of a sturdy rising labour class of Chamars could well have aided substantially. Canal building, although partly conducted through tied labour levies, gave a considerable boost to wage earning and to a freer and less unequal status for the Chamar. But in Wynne's time, with railway construction going on apace, there were instances of high-caste proprietors, even Rajputs, associating Chamars with themselves in partnership on their *sir* holdings.[9]

All this was only the first stir of commercialized agriculture and it would be wrong to exaggerate its extent. It would also be wrong to look on the bulk of moneyed men as agricultural improvers. The settlement officers were doubtless heavily prejudiced against them, but they were unanimous in this district in their condemnation of the moneylender transformed into a landlord. They saw his scheming divert agricultural profits away from the dominant peasantry by substituting low-caste tenant-labourers. Raising productivity was no part of his philosophy. Moneylender penetration into land-

[9] *Saharanpur SR 1870*, p. 138.

holding succeeded most readily in areas characterized by a heterogeneous population. Colvin, it will be recalled, had observed the same feature in Kandhla pargana where even the Jats had suffered significant losses in their land rights, in contrast to neighbouring regions on the south where they were too solidly settled to be seriously disturbed.

To look in this way at the north-west quarter of Saharanpur district, where moneylender penetration of the land before 1857 was greatest, is to proceed by negatives, since this was not the area in which the major rural violence occurred. Yet its contiguity to that area and above all the pattern of its social forms, as these can be dimly described from the available evidence, make it of primary importance. 'The revolutionary portions of the district', as H. D. Robertson called them, were to be found in the south-west quarter, and principally in the parganas of Nakur, Gangoh, and Deoband. Robertson was not merely responsible for the suppression of the fierce risings in these parganas but his reports and his book describing the disturbances provided a trenchant interpretation of them which has helped to influence all subsequent general theories about the nature of popular participation in the 1857 Revolt. Robertson's experience covered the entire district, since it was he who was sent out to deal with the other major area of trouble, in the Ganges valley, where the Banjaras commenced looting villages south of Jawalpur and carrying off cattle and grain. Yet these were the depredations of wandering pastoralists against a settled peasantry and could be contained by small punitive expeditions. There were scattered incidents elsewhere in the district, like the gathering of 200 Gujars intent on attacking Manglaur (south of Rurki) on 22 June, and the setting up of Umrao Singh as raja at Manikpur (modern Adampur Manakpur, seven miles west of Rurki), where he became 'the leader of all the disaffected Goojurs in the Pergunnah'.[10] Gujars also mustered at Malhipur on the south of Saharanpur for an attack on the city and were forcibly scattered by troops on 21 May. But effectively the serious violence was confined to the Deoband region and to the western portion of the district that ran southward from Nakur.

[10] *NE* i. 469. List of persons eminent for disloyalty in Zillah Saharanpore, UP State Archives, Allahabad. Saharanpur Collectorate Pre-Mutiny Records. Judicial Letters issued to Commr., May 1856–Oct. 1858, f. 216.

There is a difference in emphasis in the official accounts of the early disturbances, but all acknowledged that resentment at the moneylenders' hold ranked as a prominent incentive for popular violence. Spankie, the Collector and Magistrate, tried indeed to argue that rebellion was not at first contemplated:

> The plundering tribe of the Goojurs was the first affected, and the Rangurs were not far behind them. There was, however, no general outbreak until the disturbances at Muzuffurnaggur occurred [presumably on 21 May]. Then wave after wave of disquiet rolled through the district . . . The assemblies of Goojurs and others became more and more frequent. Ancient tribe or caste feuds were renewed; village after village was looted; bankers were either robbed of their property or had to pay fines to protect it. The zemindars and villagers took advantage of the general anarchy to obtain from mahajuns and buneahs their books of business and bond debts, etc. It would appear as if the disturbances in the commencement were less directed against Government than against particular people and castes. When the fall of Delhi ceased to be looked upon as imminent, the agricultural communities began to turn their eyes towards the local treasuries, and did not scruple to oppose themselves to Government officers and troops.[11]

Dundas Robertson, who saw a great deal more of the fighting, took a much more pointed view than Spankie who for the most part felt bound to keep himself at civil headquarters. Robertson's first major engagement was with the Gujar villages east of Deoband on 27 May, where he had originally gone to protect the town from a threatened attack by the Pandir Rajputs on the west and had found himself caught up with unexpectedly wide resistance when he sought to punish the Gujar villages of Babupur, Fatehpur, and Sampla Bakal for armed robbery on the Bijnor road. Robertson had visited this area merely four miles east of Deoband along the Kali Nadi stream some six weeks earlier in the course of revising the revenue settlement and found the transformation bewildering. 'Troops might mutiny, but I could hardly realize this rapid change among peaceful villagers.'[12]

The military force which Robertson was accompanying consisted of a troop of the 4th Lancers, and thirty men of the 29th NI, who were eventually to break into mutiny on 9 July. After being met in the field by a body of 400 Gujars, the contest with which was

[11] *NE* i. 467–8.

[12] Robertson, *District Duties*, p. 43. Cf. Robertson to Spankie, *NE* i. 483–4. Stokes, *Peasant and the Raj*, pp. 163–7.

doubtful for a time, Robertson decided not to move with so small and unsteady a force against the Rajputs of the Katha. For the experience had shown him clearly 'that the zemindars were one with the lower orders; that rebellion, not plunder alone, actuated the mass of the population'. Not only did his diagnosis assert that from the earliest moment the land-controlling elements among the unruly peasantry were deliberately striking out against British rule, but his subsequent experience convinced him of the nature of the motivation to rebellion.

Disturbances in the western portion of the district first flared up in the Jumna valley (*khadir*) at Tabar, four miles north-west of Nakur, where Bakshi, a Rangar, 'had assembled a large body of followers with whom he threatened to attack Nuckoor or Sirsawa'. Driven across the Jumna into the Thanesar district on or about 27 May, Bakshi returned to participate in the great Gujar uprising which occurred in late June and which began with the sack of Nakur. When Robertson arrived with the troops on 20 June he found the Nakur *tahsil* offices and *thana* (police station) in flames and 'all the Government records, with the Mahajuns' accounts, bonds etc. . . . torn up and scattered over neighbouring gardens'. The seat of disturbance clearly lay there, and after punishing villages in the immediate neighbourhood of Nakur Robertson proceeded in the general direction of Gangoh through the 'upland' (*bangar*). 'Revolt had now become universal throughout this tract, and it became a question which body of rebels ought to be first dealt with as the best chance of overawing the rest into submission, our force being too small to entertain a hope of reaching all our enemies.'[13] Ignoring hostile villages like Ghatampur and several in the vicinity of Ambehta, Robertson struck at Budha Khera, a village near the Jumna escarpment, where 'Furtuah' had proclaimed himself King of the Gujars. Failing to bring the rebel leader to battle, he pushed on through Gangoh, to encounter and defeat some 3,000 Rangars who were settled about Kunda Kalan in the extreme south-west of the district, and who were threatening to attack Lakhnauti and Gangoh.

From these whirlwind experiences Robertson drew an unhesitating set of conclusions. He was patently not satisfied with the argument that the breakdown of order had simply released the criminal

[13] Robertson, *District Duties*, p. 120.

elements and that the attacks on towns, including the Government offices, were actuated by nothing more than a lust for plunder. He saw them plainly as conscious acts of rebellion in which a hatred of British rule had developed from a hatred of the *bania ka raj*, 'the rule of the moneylender-trader'. For he observed that 'the creditors of the poorer classes of cultivators invariably inhabit the larger towns, so that these towns naturally enough become a point of attack when the civil power was paralysed'. 'No class', he considered, 'seems to have acted with so vindictive a hatred against us as the smaller class of landholders whom the bunyahs had dispossessed through the medium of our courts.'[14] Experience at Deoband confirmed the analysis. In late July while concluding an expedition against the Banjaras in the Ganges *khadir*, he learned 'that the whole country around Deoband had again risen with the intention of attacking that important place'; and on 22 July he marched to save the town from further assault by the Gujar and Katha Rajput bands, a third of it having already been savagely plundered and sacked. 'The same scenes that had occurred at Nookur(?) had here been re-enacted on a larger scale; the attack having originated from nearly the same motives, viz. plunder and the destruction of banyahs' accounts and bonds.'[15]

The fact that both at Nakur and Deoband the quarter occupied by Muslims was spared from attack confirmed Robertson's belief in the political origins of the revolt. Behind the uprising of the Hindu peasantry against their economic grievances was the hand of the inveterately hostile Muslim petty gentry.

> Such investigations as it was possible to make . . . proved that the Mahomedans in this tract were throughout the instigators of the revolt. They had risen as a body, and the Hindoos who swelled their ranks, rendering the rising universal, were almost all of that class who would gain by anarchy and the destruction of the records of their debts, and that this latter inducement to revolt was one of their keenest relishes it was easy to observe.[16]

The influential Muslims of Mabahta and Nakur, Robertson alleged, 'had excited the Goojurs generally by hopes of plunder, destruction of bunyahs' accounts, bonds, etc., and the more influential amongst them such as "Futtuah" with the chance of regaining the

[14] Robertson, *District Duties*, pp. 134–7.

[15] Robertson, *District Duties*, p. 158. Cf. Robertson to Spankie, 4 Aug. 1857; *NE* i. 481–2.

[16] Robertson, *District Duties*, pp. 133–4.

consequence tradition had assigned them in this part of the country, once the principality of their ancestors'. The Kundar Rangars, a Muslim Rajput community, were prompted purely by the communal motive of re-establishing Muslim supremacy, for Robertson could detect no material grievance; 'unlike the improvident Goojurs their villages are generally populous and wealthy, so that plunder could hardly be their inducement to disaffection, and I could not but admire their bigoted daring'.[17]

Here then was the revolutionary compound—a peasantry that was losing its control of land rights to urban moneylenders through the British system of compulsory transfer of land in satisfaction of debt, and was goaded into insurrection by bigoted Muslim gentry elements determined to throw off the infidel yoke. In the western portion of the North-Western Provinces, it appeared an immensely plausible explanation for all those British officials prepared to admit that rural disturbances were more than the release of free-floating violence and showed distinct popular enmity towards foreign rule. Spankie, the Collector, reflected realistically on the respectful submissiveness he encountered in December 1857 in the Rurki *tahsil* which contrasted so strongly with the turbulence of a few months earlier. But he did not see any concert between Gujar insurgency and Muslim activities, for on the eastern side of the district Muslims had defended their townships like the Raos of Jowalpur.

> The people of this district, and all others in the country I suppose, have no sympathy with Government, British or Native. Separate castes and communities have separate ends and desires to attain, and the weakness of Government is their strength . . . Revenge and loot in the first instance led the agricultural communities here astray. The burning of records, etc., in Tehseel Nukoor was the crowning result of a determination to have no obligations towards any one. The common brotherhood of all Mohomedans is a very different matter, and I think it would be impossible to deny that they were in heart and soul against us. They had everything to gain and little to lose as a general rule. They were in arms against the excesses of the Goojurs, simply because their time here had not come. The Goojurs and others were out for a temporary gain and to make the best of the present. The moment they found theirs a losing game, they stopped it; and they bow to the strong hand as long as it is strong. The Mahomedan population is ever against us.[18]

[17] *NE* i. 486.

[18] R. Spankie, 6 Mar. 1858; *NE* i. 477.

How far a specifically Muslim consciousness and purpose can be identified as an independent historical element is dubious, but the deep penetration of Islam among the ranks of the peasantry was a peculiar feature of the upper Doab and adds considerable complexity to the issue. This was especially true of the Gujar community in Gangoh where on the *bangar* upland a third of aggregate Gujar landholdings belonged to Muslim Gujars.[19] Robertson's argument was, however, that the Gujars were incited to violence by the petty Muslim gentry of Ambehta and Nakur but that their grievances were fundamentally economic. Yet the statistics show that the moneylender had made least headway in the *bangar* tract of Gangoh in the Gujar heartland. It was, said Wynne,

> held and cultivated by utterly improvident Goojurs, who form a compact mass, able and willing to keep any outsider from settling among them. A few wealthy bankers have ventured to purchase a whole village here and there, but as a rule all who have ventured to buy up the share of an impoverished coparcener have been unable to make their footing good in their new purchase. The warning has been accepted by moneyed men in general, so that now a Goojur of these parts can get no credit whatever . . . From all these causes it has come about that Gungoh is a tract where, by all accounts, the Goojur character may be studied in its perfection, unadulterated by foreign admixture.

The contiguous *bangar* tract of Nakur pargana on the north differed little. With the exception of five villages held by Pathans and a few owned by the Sheikhs of Ambahta, 'nearly the whole group is owned and cultivated by Goojurs, who share more in the careless and turbulent ways of their brethren in Gungoh than in the comparatively industrious habits of those in Sirsawah and Sooltanpoor'. By Wynne's time *mahajan* holdings in Nakur *bangar* were 5 per cent and in Gangoh *bangar* 12 per cent. In no sense did these figures support Robertson's assertion that loss of land to moneylenders lay at the back of Gujar violence in these tracts. Yet perhaps the resolute resistance to moneylender intrusion may indicate that the threat to the Gujar heartland was sufficient. For in the Jumna valley *mahajan* holdings were considerable. The soil varied violently from irrigated patches which carried fine crops of rice and sugarcane to arid sandy stretches of the worst description. The village

[19] Le Poer Wynne, *Saharanpur SR 1870*, p. 100.

landholders were extremely mixed—Brahmins, Jats, Garahs, Tyagis, Chauhans, Mughals, and Muslim Rajputs predominating over Gujars, who were a distinctively minority community. In the *khadir* and 'mixed bangar and khadir' tracts (as defined by the settlement officer), *mahajan* landholdings by the mid-1860s amounted to 17 per cent and 21 per cent respectively in Nakur, and 45 per cent and 36 per cent in Gangoh. Also in the south-west of Gangoh 'a small colony of outsiders' had 'effected a lodgment in this stronghold of Goojurism' in the shape of the Powell family estates, and after the Mutiny Rao Doomechund received two confiscated Rangar villages in reward. This remained the most unredeemed corner, the Rangars being regarded as 'even a shade more turbulent men than the Goojurs'.

Yet to redress the notion of some impermeable 'tribal' entity of 'Goojurism' was the startling example of the canal-irrigated villages of Gangoh a few miles away on the eastern side of the pargana. Here Wynne had difficulty in finding adequate superlatives to describe the economic and social revolution. The 9,000 odd acres belonged largely to Gujars, who like those in Rampur pargana on the east had 'been reclaimed from the improvident habits and the tendency to cattle-lifting which characterize their brethren in the rest of the pergunnah. This happy result is due to the canal. The reward which the use of canal water held out to industry was so great, so immediate, and so certain, that all the traditions of caste have succumbed to the prospects of wealth so that the Goojurs throughout the region watered by the canal are the most orderly, contented, and well-to-do of men.'[20] In the Gangoh canal tract, some 66 per cent of the cultivation was under the four staple cash crops, half of this being in rice. All this had been achieved without undue dependence on the moneylender, who had acquired some 11 per cent of this small tract (989 out of 9,281 acres). How far therefore resentment against the moneylender was the real motive of the Gujars in the *bangars* tracts—even if the threat from them still remained largely a prospective one—and how far it was resentment against the British administration is a large question. But one may properly suspect that the *mahajan* was being made a scapegoat for the sins of earlier settlement officers. The startling discrepancy arming Gujar grievance was not that the *bangar* tracts remained

[20] *Idem*, p. 99.

dry and unirrigated from the East Jumna Canal, but that the revenue assessment should have positively discriminated against them. In 1864–5 Wynne found the Gangoh *bangar* tract had 'long been extremely over-assessed', fifteen villages having been deserted by their owners. A large amount of land was held *hush khewut*, that is without payment of rent in order to help with the payment of the Government demand.

The penetration of a more commercial agriculture and the intrusion of urban creditors into landholding had thus produced an extraordinary differential effect over small distances and within people of the same caste community. Resistance may be regarded as either a product of the sense of relative deprivation or of last-ditch traditionalism. In this situation the residence of impoverished Muslim gentry communities provided fresh tinder. They clung for the most part to minute parcels of land in the small towns or qasbahs, Gangoh having no fewer than 1,255 coparceners, chiefly Sheikhs of the Pirzadah line. When Wynne visited the town he could not comprehend how they managed to eke out an existence, so partitioned was their property and so disdainful were they of working with their hands. He described the place as 'a hot-bed of Wahabeeism'. The inhabitants of Lakhnauti 'were, if possible, in more miserable circumstances than those of Gungoh'. The Pirzadahs of Ambehta in Nakur pargana were better-off, enjoying twenty-two revenue-free villages and living in a township that because of the fine minareted tomb of Shah Abul Malli was a place of pilgrimage. Wynne found them indebted, and Spankie and Robertson were convinced at the time that they were the principal instigators of the attack on Nakur and of the destruction of the moneylenders' houses. There was perhaps a similar connection between the Muslim urban populations of Gangoh and Lakhnauti and their co-religionists among the Rangars of Kunda Kalan, for Robertson believed the latter were intent on marching on the two towns when he encountered and dispersed their massed array. Despite his belief in their relative prosperity, the loss of nearly half their land in the Gangoh *khadir* to the *mahajans* must have sharply affected Rangar attitudes. Robertson said that he could not but admire their bigoted daring, 'never deigning to ask for quarter, but turning at once upon their pursuers, though perhaps only wretchedly armed with a *gundasah* (club) or some such weapon'. But he noted that the 14th and other irregular cavalry regiments had been

recruited from among them and neighbouring villages in the Muzaffarnagar district.[21]

There were many parallel features in the other areas of serious disturbance. The town of Deoband came under threat from two opposite directions, from the Gujar villages lying along the arid banks of the Kali Nadi on the east and from the Pandir Rajputs of the Katha on the west. Robertson successfully warded off a threat of attack at the end of May, but his reappearance on 22 July was too late to save it from being plundered. 'The same scenes that had occurred at Nopkur had here been reenacted on a larger scale; the attack having originated from nearly the same motives, viz. plunder and the destruction of bunyahs' accounts and bonds.'[22] Robertson also observed that the quarters inhabited by the Chamars, Gujars, and Muslims were untouched, though on the town outskirts and undefended, 'from which it might be suspected that these parties had some interest in the attack'.[23] The cultivated region in the immediate vicinity of Deoband was fertile and prosperous, the land being owned by a large body of petty coparceners, largely Muslim Gujars and Sheikhs who were 'quite above working for their bread, but prefer to live in idleness on the wretched pittance of rental that they screw out of the actual cultivators'.[24]

21 *NE* i. 487.
22 Robertson, *District Duties*, p. 158.
23 *NE* i. 482.
24 Wynne, *Saharanpur SR 1870*, p. 109.

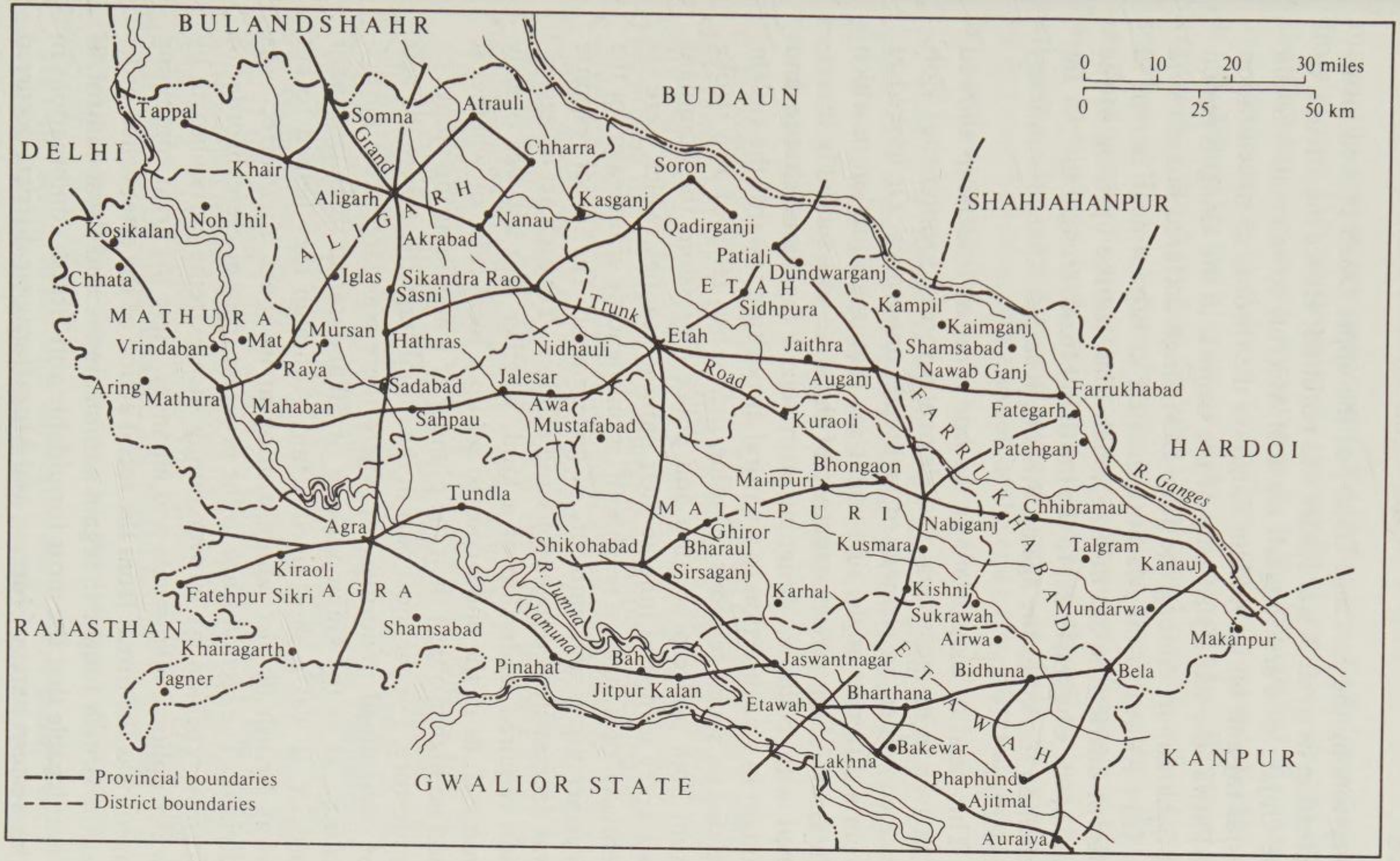
CONCLUSION

THE NATURE AND ROOTS OF PEASANT VIOLENCE IN 1857

If we allow force to Marx's dictum that the peasantry is incapable of leading itself and has to be led, then we have to accept some difficulty in isolating peasant action from its larger political framework. In 1857 wherever rural magnates exerted lordship they determined the set of any particular region for rebellion, prevarication, or collaboration. That did not mean that there was always an unquestioning adherence of peasant to lord, especially where lineage ties between them were lacking. The Collector of Aligarh noted in 1858 that if Daud Khan of Bikrampur, who was the leader of the Sherwani Afghan notables, had not possessed a fort 'he might have been trampled out by the surrounding population before he had time to recover from the surprise of the first outbreak. As it was he had time to gather his strength. He then made one or two examples of villagers who had perpetrated gross outrages, and the whole of his country was cowed, plunder was stopped.'[1] The first violence in Banda district was the murder of the estate agent of nawab Ali Bahadur in one of the villages which he had acquired by auction purchase, despite the fact that the nawab was later to become the head and front of the anti-British struggle in the region. Apart from these exceptions and qualifications, it remains true that in magnate-dominated districts the effective decision-makers remained the magnates, whether these happened to be Koer Singh or Beni Madho or the *taluqdar* rajas of Bulandhshahr, Aligarh, Etawah, Mainpuri, and Gorakhpur districts.

To isolate peasant action from magnate leadership, it is necessary for purposes of analysis to look at localities where the magnate was an absent or negligible quantity. Here when British power crumbled, the village communities had to set up their own crisis leadership. The surviving if tenacious para-village organization of the clan

[1] UP State Archives, Lucknow. BR Aligarh, File 3, W. J. Bramley to A. Cocks, Special Commr., 4 May 1858.



5. The Agra Region

khap among the Jats and Gujars of the upper Doab proved insufficient on its own. A war leader was required. Hence the attempt of the Gujars of Parikshitgarh (east of Meerut) to re-create the old Gujar raj and set up Kadam Singh on the throne, or the elevation of Fatwa, the self-styled king of the Gujars, in the Gangoh region of Saharanpur. Among the Jats, Devi Singh declared himself raja at Tappa Raya in the Mathura district; at Bijraul near Baraut in Meerut district the old *insurgé*, Shah Mal, led the uprising of the Jats of the Chaurasi Des; to the north in Muzaffarnagar district Jat rebellion turned to the ageing Pindari, Khairati Khan, for military direction.

This need to inaugurate an *ad hoc* form of leadership showed that even in its most local and elemental forms, spontaneous violence contained an element of artificial contrivance. Or looked at from a different angle, one might say that in a situation in which the overarching power structure of the state was suddenly threatened with collapse, designing men seized the main chance and sought to give direction to a natural disposition towards the violent release of social tensions. Finding themselves relieved at a stroke from both police protection and police repression, the dominant peasantry turned to indulge their natural enmities, which were essentially local, against neighbour, moneylending graindealer, or the representatives and emblems of government. The initial response was necessarily heterogeneous and random. Yet each act of aggression required leadership of a kind, whether that act was overtly political, as in the endeavour to set up a local raja, or whether it had no higher object than the plunder of a neighbouring village or grainstore. For the most part in the initial stage these were the acts of determined minorities, or where there was large-scale participation, as in the Gujar sacking of Sikandarabad in Bulandshahr district, it was a short-lived affair. Although they helped to cut away British district administration at its roots, their effect was divisive. The second stage in the progress from discrete disorder to formed rebellion lay in overcoming such extreme particularism by wider political alignments and alliances. Here the great combining agent was the threat from the recoil action of the established order as the British fought to regain administrative and fiscal control. It is noticeable that the most formidable anti-British combinations in the western parts of Meerut and Muzaffarnagar districts occurred not on the immediate outbreak of the sepoy revolt but two or three

months later when the agents were dispatched to collect the revenue instalments. This apparently was the origin of the mass upsurge of the Chaurasi Des in the Baraut area in July 1857, and of the later Jat combination in western Muzaffarnagar in September 1857. R. M. Edwards, the Magistrate and Collector of Muzaffarnagar, confided to his diary (on 28 July) that he had steadily refused to interfere in the most disturbed portion of the district for fear that on the analogy of interfering in a squabble between a man and his wife, they would both turn against the government. It was the attempt of his *tahsildars* and revenue peons to collect the instalment from the village of Parasauli at the end of August that ended internecine quarrelling:

> The whole of this part of the district is 'up' and the villains no longer war against each other as at the commencement of the disturbances but have agreed to let their private feuds remain in abeyance and war against the Government and its servants and all who assist and shelter them. This is a very dangerous feature . . .[2]

In this common anti-British upsurge, the rival Ghatwal and Balian clans (*khaps*) of the Jats sunk their differences and leagued with the petty Muslim gentry elements led by the Qazi of Thana Bhawan. This proved one of the most formidable attempts at local rebellion outside the *taluqdari* regions and succeeded in repulsing the British counter-attack on Thana Bhawan decisively. Only the fall of Delhi to the British and the reoccupation of the Doab in force checked and dissipated the movement at a vital moment.[3]

The progressive canalization of free-floating violence had no need, of course, always to assume the character of rebellion. The political complexion of wider group action could change in the course of the struggle or be determined by the separate calculations of the leadership. The initial response of formerly dominant pastoral groups like the Gujars or of 'hill-robber' peoples like the Meos of the Aravalli spurs south of Delhi was to sack the neighbouring small towns, which offered loot as well as symbolizing the world that had undone them. The Meos stormed Palwal and Hodal, the Gujars Sikandarabad and Bulandshahr. In general, this

[2] R. M. Edwards, 'Mutiny Diary', entries 28 July and 3, 15 Sept. 1857, IOL MSS Eur. C 148/1-2. Also *NE* i. 358 ff.

[3] For a brief account of this rising, see Holmes, *History of the Indian Mutiny*; Kaye and Malleson, *History of the Indian Mutiny*; vi. 123 ff.; Stokes, *Peasant and the Raj*, pp. 18, 182.

meant also attacking industrious agriculturalist communities like the Jats who had gained from the trend towards commercialized farming. In eastern Meerut and Bulandshahr the Jats formed isolated minority settlements and could find no other local ally than the British. In this restricted region they stood out as the most loyal of the loyal. Across the Jumna in the southern part of Delhi district and in Gurgaon they looked to the Jat raja of Ballabgarh, just as the diligent Ahir cultivators looked to the Ahir chief of Rewari, Rao Tula Ram. Yet this was eventually to carry them into the rebel camp, because of the separate political calculations of the two rajas. On the other hand, the Meos who attacked them, and who also assailed the column sent out by the 'rebel' king of Delhi, Bahadur Shah, to bring in the contents of the Gurgaon treasury, were no collaborators. Indeed it was among the Meos that the fiercest last-ditch resistance was mounted to the final reimposition of British rule once Delhi was retaken in late September.[4]

The unifying influence of a common enmity to government is no unfamiliar feature to the historian. Peasant risings are traditionally tax rebellions. As in seventeenth-century France, the land revenue burden in India has always been acknowledged as an important element in the revolt of 1857. Yet the severe pressure of the assessment operated unevenly. All the evidence points before 1857 to a situation in which the enhanced demand could not be met by raising so-called 'rents' or immediate cultivator payments. It was found for the most part by an expansion of cultivation within the boundaries of the *mahal* or tax-paying unit. In the thirty years of the settlements made in the later 1830s, the cultivated area is reckoned to have grown by some 30 per cent.[5] The pressure of the revenue demand was felt most keenly where it could not be alleviated by expanded cultivation either because of the narrow margin of arable waste or because of the absence of capital to open it up. The pressure was felt with special severity where cultivators were also for the most part 'owners' (or *malguzars* responsible for the revenue demand), that is to say, among the *bhaiachara* and imperfect *pattidari* communities of peasant farmers. A cultivating owner would normally hang on to his proprietary title long after a rent-receiving landlord would have disposed of it. Hence the usual sign of extreme pressure on the peasantry was public sale. In 1846 the

[4] K. C. Yadav, *The Revolt of 1857 in Haryana* (Delhi, 1977).
[5] Stokes, *Peasant and the Raj*, p. 107.

Board of Revenue noted that only in four districts—Aligarh, Mainpuri, Mathura, and Banda—were there compulsory sales of proprietary rights among village communities for revenue default, and the Board ascribed these to the pressure of the revenue demand.[6] Except partially in Mainpuri this degree of over-assessment went uncorrected down to 1857, and undoubtedly goes a long way to explaining the intensity of rural violence in these districts and its almost instantaneous conversion into rebellion.

It has to be noted that these were districts where peasant proprietorship was intermixed with substantial magnate 'estates'. In Aligarh and Mathura peasant proprietors who found themselves particularly affected were in occupation of the dry northern portions of Noh Jhil and Khair *tahsils*. Despite hereditary feuds between them over land rights, the Jats and Rajputs of Khair sunk their differences and launched a violent attack on the *tahsil* offices, under the leadership of the old Chauhan, Rao Bhupal Singh. In pargana Tappal the rebellious Jat communities were described as 'notoriously poor' and had been flayed by an assessment rate that took no account of the insecure character of agriculture in the western tracts towards the Jumna. Here taxation had driven the peasantry into debt.

Historical primers have always made great play with the crushing nature of agrarian debt, but in practice it was a serious incubus only at the extensive and intensive margins—that is to say, where through population pressure on good soil and commercial investment in land titles (especially in the neighbourhood of district capital towns) the peasant was being impoverished, or where the cultivating population was thinner because of niggardly soil and insecure rainfall and remained too poor to accumulate its own credit resources. The latter was the condition of pargana Tappal long before 1846, when the Collector reported that 'in a large proportion of the villages in P^{n} Tuppul the Bhorahs [loosely, local bankers] from the time of the Begum Sumroo have been virtually the managers of the estates and that though the settlement was made with the present lumberdars, the cultivation was entirely dependent on the assistance which the Borahs afforded'.[7] A couple of bad seasons in 1843 and 1844 in the wake of the 1837 famine

[6] G. Blunt, Collr. Aligarh, to D. B. Morrison, Commr. Meerut, 28 Feb. 1846. BR Aligarh, File 1, UP State Archives, Lucknow.

[7] *Idem*.

were sufficient to induce the moneylender to withhold credit and a general revenue default ensued. Yet even when the British tried to realize the demand by resorting to the sale of proprietary titles, they could find no purchasers, having to buy in the titles themselves and subsequently farm out the revenue rights to men who were closely related to the former village proprietors. The weight of the demand, the uncertainty of agriculture, and the refractoriness of the Jat clansmen made proprietary rights valueless. Moneylenders proved unwilling to invest their capital in *malguzari* rights although they were perfectly prepared in ordinary seasons to advance seed on loan and secure the perquisites of acting as village accountants *patwaris*. Since it was impossible in these conditions to punish revenue defaulters by the effective transfer of land rights, a long tradition of recalcitrance had been established even before direct British administration began in 1836 after the lapse of the Begam Samru's assignment (*jagir*). Default became a regular means of securing revenue remissions, and a certain calculated defiance of government a way of life.[8] Swollen and much subdivided *bhaiachara* Jat communities also worked the relatively poor soil immediately to the south in Noh Jhil (Mathura district), and in 1857 proved the most resolute of the foes of government. Mark Thornhill described it as the worst pargana of the rebellious Mathura district.[9] In both these parganas the revenue rate fell with great severity directly on to the back of the cultivating peasant holder.

Yet many village communities of cultivating proprietors bore the highest revenue rates without breakdown where agriculture was secure, the soil fertile, and credit forthcoming. In the finest tracts in all the North-Western Provinces, the western canal-irrigated parganas of Meerut and Muzaffarnagar districts in the upper Doab, the Jats shouldered a prodigious revenue burden. Of Kirthul village in Chhaprauli pargana (Meerut), the settlement officer could write in 1867 when revising the pre-Mutiny settlement: 'This is a noble estate but the old assessment was fearfully heavy and only Jats could have stood it.'[10] Of Bijraul, from which the rebel

[8] For pargana Tappal, see also J. R. Hutchinson, *Allygurh Statistics* (Roorkee, 1856), pp. 208–15; Atkinson, *Gaz.* ii, pt. i (Allahabad, 1875), pp. 607–12; Thomas R. Metcalf, *Land, Landlords and the British Raj* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1979), pp. 109–12, 131–2.

[9] Stokes, *Peasant and the Raj*, p. 195.

[10] Comparative Statement of Old and Proposed Assessment on Pergunnah Barote, Zillah Meerut. UP State Archives, Lucknow. BR Meerut, File 27 (Box 5).

leader, Shah Mal, hailed, he wrote that it was a splendid village but bore the highest rates of rent for its land that he had found in the pargana, and had sustained the extraordinary revenue rate of Rs. 4.10.6 per cultivated acre. These revenue rates were wholly discriminatory, nearby Rajput and Tyagi villages paying at much lower levels. Over-assessment, or perhaps more acutely, differential assessment, must be posited as the motive for the sustained uprising in this region, in the absence of large-scale indebtedness or transfers to outsiders.

Yet over-assessment seems such a ready explanation of rural revolt (that is, uprising in which government was the direct target) that other predisposing causes may escape attention. One feature which linked the poor Jat communities of pargana Tappal in Aligarh with their thriving cash-crop caste-mates in western Meerut and Muzaffarnagar was the intense subdivision of tenurial rights. Jats bred freely with often a plurality of wives and concubines, the sons succeeding to full inheritance rights. Unlike the prevalent disposition among Rajputs to share rental profits rather than seek direct cultivating possession, Jats were quicker to subdivide the land itself. This overcrowding of the proprietary body produced a natural explosiveness. Of Kirthul village in Chhaprauli pargana it was said in 1867: 'The proprietary body swarm and can only exist by cultivating lands in other villages for miles around. Their individual holdings are reduced to fractions of beeghas even—emigration must soon take place.'[11] Forbes, the settlement officer, wrote more generally of the Jats:

> Their own estates will not, however, contain them; they have burst forth, and travel far to cultivate lands assessed at lighter rates, yet they hold to their villages, and will not leave the infinitesimal ancestral shares in order to better themselves in other tracts less populated than their own. There are, however, signs which prove how little is wanting to move them—a lighter assessment enabling them to accumulate capital, and a law legalizing the enforcement of imperfect partition, whereby each man may learn what to call his own field, and find a value and purchaser for it, will send forth the industrious enterprising Jats as colonists into tracts yet covered with grass and jungle, and raise them into the position of competitors with the bunniahs for the purchase of encumbered estates.[12]

In the absence of opportunities to expand (although of course there was considerable expansion of the cultivated area in the Jat

[11] *Idem.*
[12] *Meerut SR 1874*, p. 10.

parganas during the '1833' settlements), the Jats were driven downwards. While, of course, there was no reluctance to cultivate the soil or handle the plough such as kept the swollen Rajput proprietary communities clinging to rental profits for as long as they could, the Jats were different from their kinsmen in Haryana. For in the Doab they commanded a substantial predial labour class of Chamars. Hence the danger of reduction to the level of the landless Chamar labourer may well have given a social edge to resentment against the existing order as represented by the white man's raj. In its way such resentment may have been as keen as that of the Chhattri communities of the eastern districts and of south-eastern Oudh, who rather than descend into mere tillers of the soil went into the army and police and took service in the native states. In that sense, the rural upheaval can be read as the product of a frustrated or threatened peasant élite.

Associated with the common belief in over-assessment as one of the principal causes of rural disaffection has been the question of the transfer of land rights. How far were the peasantry as distinct from higher levels of *zamindars* affected by the substantial displacement of proprietary title? One has to start from the logical contradiction between the process of over-assessment and that of transfer. In theory, transferability of title could be effective only where the *malguzari* right had a saleable value. In pargana Tappal, we have seen that the weight of the revenue demand and the refractoriness of the village communities rendered the title valueless and untransferable. Elsewhere in Aligarh, however, private as distinct from compulsory transfers occurred on a massive scale between 1838 and 1858, attaining to something like a half of the land of the district. If *malguzari* rights were valueless because of widespread over-assessment, how can this high volume of transfers be explained? Clearly a distinction has to be made between a right which was gaining in places a modest value of between two and five years' purchase and the ability of different types of *malguzari* to meet an unremitting demand levied in quarterly instalments. While village communites could endure a much heavier weight of demand than small *zamindari* properties, they could not tide themselves over short-term disaster when credit was withheld. (Nor for that matter could substantial *taluqdari* estates, the British deliberately breaking up the *taluqs* of Etawah district on their default in the wake of the 1837 famine.) Large-scale selling-up of village proprietors seems to have

occurred in areas brought under cash-crop agriculture from an early date, particularly the indigo tracts of Aligarh, or the cotton tracts of Banda and neighbouring Bundelkhand districts. In Aligarh the high transfer rate immediately after 1840 was apparently quickened by the enforcement of old indigo debts which had been sold off by European planters in the collapse of the late 1820s and bought for trifling sums by opportunist speculators and moneyed men. But this itself signified the existence of a speculative element willing to invest in *malguzari* titles in cash-cropping areas. Certainly 'hot money' from wealth gained in official careers in Awadh at the beginning of the nineteenth century was one of the reasons for investment in *malguzari* titles and the massive subversion of the pattern of landholding in Kanpur district; and the same phenomenon was evident in other areas important for producing cash crops like wheat, sugar, and opium in the eastern districts with Benares as the nodal point. The Special Commission set up in 1819 had to deal with a mass of transfers, particularly in the Allahabad and Kanpur districts, that were based on naked fraud on the part of the officials of the government offices. For the most part, these transfers affected village élites who were holding on to some form of *pattidari* tenure in which rental profits rather than direct agricultural profits played a major role. Such tenures are generally associated with Rajput land control, which it is known suffered severe displacement in the first half of the nineteenth century. In Aligarh district, Rajput losses were especially marked, exceeding 50 per cent in the period 1838–68.[13] It is noticeable, however, that Jat losses were relatively slight despite the high volume of transfers. This suggests that where Jat *bhaichara* communities were established on good soil there was sufficient internal differentiation and sufficient clan cohesiveness for the richer Jat peasants to buy up the poorer. But the real difference lay between the semi-*rentier* form of landlordism practised by the Rajput lord and the direct cultivating possession of the Jat which did not in *bhaiachara* communities admit of a tenant class.

The degree to which transfer of title had meaning and effect was thus clearly dependent on the social organization of the agrarian community. Because Jats were essentially agriculturalists rather than village landlords and gathered more densely, they were much less easy to displace than the smaller groups of Rajput village proprietors who lorded it over a dependent peasantry. Given the fact

[13] Stokes, *Peasant and the Raj*, p. 192.

that no form of land transfer was capable in general terms of displacing any village proprietor from his *sir* or home farm, the *rentier* forms of tenure were much more vulnerable to the sale process. Since the proprietary possession of Rajputs far exceeded their cultivating possession (even in Banda, where Rajputs had evolved a type of *bhaiachara* tenure), loss of title meant loss of rental rights, although the ex-proprietor would normally remain in possession of his *sir* at privileged rates of holding. In contrast, loss of title in Jat owner-cultivator communities, a rarer phenomenon, could often mean very little, as when the Jat rajas of Kuchesar in Bulandshahr district succeeded in getting themselves recognized as full proprietors.

The *bhaiachara* tenure was the exception rather than the rule. The right to pay the land revenue direct to government was not in itself necessarily highly prized, for revenue farmers were happily tolerated in Haryana in the 1830s as John Lawrence observed, for there was no question of them being able to interfere with the underlying tenures.[14] In Banda district, the Rajput communities came nearest to *bhaiachara* tenures. Given the fact that over-assessment must have reduced their 'landlord' profits to a minimum, loss of proprietary rights over so-called tenants must have been felt more as a political than an economic deprivation. The agrarian explosion in Banda in 1857 took the form of an attack on the *karindas* or resident agents of absentee auction purchasers, who dwelt for the most part in Kanpur. In the trans-Ganges parganas of the Allahabad district the evicted *karindas* were replaced by the agents of the Oudh *taluqdars* like Beni Madho who had formerly held overlord rights. The villagers were either happily acquiescing in a reversion to the old order or more probably looking to the *taluqdars* for protection against British vengeance. Hence it would seem that it was immediately the political rather than the economic consequences of land transfer that were important to the dominant peasantry.

Indeed, in studying the action of rural society what impresses itself is the impossibility of disentangling the economic element from its social and political integument. Neither forced nor free commercialization of agriculture, nor heavy taxation, nor indebtedness, mortgage, or distress sales of land titles, can on their

[14] Report on Pergunnah Rewarree, 22 July 1838, *Sel. Reps. Rev. Settl. Delhie Territory*, No. 1, pp. 15–17.

own explain the incidence and character of rural violence. This is what makes generalization so difficult. The variety of local social forms expressed in the varieties of tenure and ethnic grouping require to be looked at district by district. Until that is done, we are striking matches in the dark.

EDITOR'S CONCLUDING NOTE

ERIC STOKES AND THE UPRISING OF 1857

THE study of Indian agrarian history occupied the best part of Eric Stokes's working life. *The English Utilitarians and India* (1959) contained much that related to English political thought and the study of Indian government: themes to which he returned in his last published paper. And while working on the 1857 Rebellion he made frequent forays into the realm of comparative colonial history or theories of imperialism. Yet Stokes returned again and again to the peasant world of India by whose colour and vitality he had been enthralled during the War when serving as a subaltern in the Indian Mounted Artillery. It is not surprising that during the years 1963–80, while he gathered material for *The Peasant Armed*, his perceptions of the key issues changed considerably. He claimed sometimes that he was 'ploughing a lonely furrow' in wrestling with the complexities of Indian tenurial forms, but being an acute historiographer himself, Stokes was keenly aware of changes of mood and interest among his students and colleagues. Relishing the debate more than the definitive statement, most of the essays he collected in *The Peasant and the Raj* (1978) and in the present volume were attempts to find solutions to problems, to respond to the ideas of other historians, rather than guides to the general reader or expositions of a final position. It is this that gives the work its allusive, even paradoxical quality. While Stokes could write with breadth and verve, as witness his review articles in the *Times Literary Supplement*, the chapters and essays on the Rebellion were written with a sterner purpose: to alert colleagues and students to the complexity and variability of social movements in an ancient agrarian society. Here Stokes the wrangler disciplined Stokes the stylist.

One key theme was never modified. The Indian Rebellion of 1857 was not one movement, be it a peasant revolt or a war of national liberation; it was many. The lineaments of revolt differed vastly from district to district, even village to village, and were determined by a complex counterpoint reflecting ecology, tenurial forms, and the variable impact of the colonial state. That this appears obvious now is only because Stokes's ideas have been

absorbed into the historical record. When he began writing, it was still fashionable to seek overarching characteristics. Agrarian movements were classified as 'traditional' or 'post-pacification', while revolt was attributed to whole classes such as the 'rich peasant', the 'middle peasant', or the 'traditional aristocracy'. But while Stokes never abandoned his concern for a sense of place, for the local specificity of revolt, the categories which he used to describe and analyse these events were gradually modified. He himself pointed to one such development—his gradual abandonment of the notion that caste groups in themselves were appropriate basic units of analysis of the revolt. This is a good place to begin, for the role of caste has been a great source of confusion, especially for those who are not specialists in Indian history.

When Stokes started work on the Rebellion, analysis of Indian history and politics in terms of great regional unities of caste (Rajputs, Bhumihar Brahmins, Jats, and so on) was in vogue in the West. This trend was itself part of an attempt to break away from history written with great men as actors and from history which attempted to force Indian reality into simplistic class categories drawn from Western societies. Indians themselves, it was thought, were loath to consider these important issues because to them 'casteism' was derogatory to Indian nationhood, a machiavellian ploy of the colonial power. The caste categories into which the *Imperial Gazetteers* had carved Indian society were accordingly dropped when the new Republic produced its own gazetteers. In the great rush of Indian writing which accompanied the centenary of the Rebellion in 1957 caste was hardly mentioned, except in a descriptive sense, while the history of nationalism was still written in terms of 'middle classes'.

The aim in the early 1960s was to construct a modern history of India in which social categories relevant to Indian society replaced great men. Contemporary anthropological work on India which concerned caste systems was enlisted. A vast mass of source material existed in the *District Gazetteers* and *Settlement Reports* of the nineteenth century and this also provided fascinating social detail to fill out the history of events drawn from *Parliamentary Papers* or memoirs. For this reason, Stokes's early essays on the Rebellion, particularly his 'Walidad Khan' (*The Peasant and the Raj*, chapter 6), mount an interpretation which takes broadly defined caste and communal groups as the constituencies in which

leaders and aristocrats worked out their response to the collapse of British power. Here the main contenders were Afghan Muslims and Hindu Rajputs. Edward I. Brodkin, who completed his doctoral dissertation under Stokes, took the argument further. He argued that the clashes in the western tract of Rohilkhand during 1857 were not necessarily anti-British. All that happened was that conflicts which arose as a result of the disparities between more recently settled Afghan and older Rajput lords under the Company erupted into local fights for succession to British rule. These communities were later perceived as loyal or rebellious largely because it was the Afghans who moved first and seemed therefore to offer the more direct challenge to the waning British power.[1]

Stokes never abandoned caste categories as descriptive labels for the groups he wished to discuss. But much of his later work was directed to modifying and refining his original bald view that whole regional castes were the basic units of analysis. Here again developments outside his immediate area of historiography informed and stimulated the response. Anthropologists in Britain and America were themselves moving away from the monolithic view of caste. E. R. Leach, for instance, argued that since caste was a system of ritual and social interdependencies at village level, caste conflict was a misperception.[2] In the later 1960s and early 1970s, the multi-caste faction became the centre of attention in both history and sociology. Sometimes, as in the work of A. D. Carter,[3] these factions were seen to have a material basis in the disposition of resources; sometimes, as in the analyses of Ralph Nicholas and Ronald Inden,[4] cultural bonds were regarded as supreme. But empirical research had clearly refuted the old, simple model. Eric Stokes's work both reflected and informed this new approach, for the faction made up of several castes made its début both in his own work and in that of his younger colleagues working on the politics of Indian nationalism. Detailed work on the Delhi area which he completed after visiting India in 1975–6 seemed to prove the vacuousness of the

[1] E. I. Brodkin, 'The struggle for succession: rebels and loyalists in the Indian Mutiny of 1857', *Modern Asian Studies*, vi. 3 (1972).

[2] E. R. Leach (ed.), *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and N.W. Pakistan* (Cambridge, 1962).

[3] A. T. Carter, *Elite Politics in Rural India* (Cambridge, 1974).

[4] R. Nicholas and R. Inden, 'A cultural analysis of Bengali kinship' (Chicago) *South Asia Series, Occasional Paper* 18, 91–7.

broad caste categories. In some parts of his study area, for instance, the large regional caste group designated Jat made up 80 per cent of the population; in other places, less than 20 per cent. Moreover Jats were found on both 'sides' during the revolt. Reconstructing the history of 1857 from later *Settlement Reports*, it seemed to Stokes that the key groups here were multi-caste factions (*dharras*). These were made up of Jat 'pioneer' peasants who had settled in different waves during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries supported by groups of clients from other similar castes or by agricultural dependants. Thus the supra-caste faction was the basic unit of organization during 1857. The motives for revolt were to be found in the issue of relative 'material deprivation' (a problem which will be considered later). In this case the Jat village-controllers and their non-Jat allies who had profited from the opening of the East Jumna Canal remained quiet. The Jat-led multi-caste faction located in the 'thirsty', unirrigated tracts to the west who had suffered from high revenue assessments were the ones who revolted.

Other chapters in the present work demonstrate this slow modification of the notion that caste was the key category of revolt or, in any simple sense, the basic unit of Indian rural society. Take the case of the Gujars, a semi-nomadic caste of cattle-keepers, pastoralists, and petty cultivators living in a wide swathe of country from eastern Rajasthan through to the upper Doab. Many colonial officials classed the Gujars as a criminal tribe because of their supposed addiction to plunder and they were disposed to see the 1857 Rebellion in its civil aspect as a conspiracy to loot hatched by the 'dregs of society'. It is of course true that Gujars and other elements which went to make up the groups of casual labourers living around British military cantonments were sometimes at the forefront of looting once the police and the military had disintegrated. But the notion that the Gujars were the prime force for revolt in the west of the region had much more to do with the desire of officialdom to preserve the reputation of the 'sturdy' Jat peasant farmer who was being groomed for the role of late Victorian development agent in the area. Gujar magnates and villages—especially those beginning to settle to secure agriculture—held aloof from revolt while those Gujars who did plunder were as much a menace to the lines of supply of the insurgents and the King of Delhi as they were to British communications.

Stokes came to make a further set of important qualifications regarding the role of caste in the case of the Rajputs, the classic royal warrior category of north India. At best, Rajputs were a broad grouping of endogamous castes with life-style and perceived status alone as common features. But even the basic endogamous groups within the Rajput category (sub-castes such as the Bais or Baghel Rajputs) could not form the basic unit of analysis in the revolt. This was because there was an important distinction between those Rajputs who fulfilled a distant, lordly role in the villages, and those who were village-level magnates or actual cultivators, controlling production in closely knit and densely settled brotherhoods. The lordly category of Rajput *rentiers* existed where the land was rich enough to support a class of rent receivers and also where Mughal and post-Mughal regimes had selected out and maintained them as allies in rural society. Consequently their status as rajas and their right to share in the profits of superior land-revenue management were recognized by the overlords. Conversely, where the land was poorer or recent settlement was of the pioneer peasant sort, Rajputs had often been reduced to no more than a rural cultivating caste with vague pretensions to gentry status. Some of them were even prepared to plough themselves (a sign of discredit to their lordly caste-fellows) or to marry outside the limits of caste and clan with a variety of other equivalent or lower cultivating communities. During the Rebellion, as Stokes implies and as Thomas R. Metcalf has fully demonstrated in his *Land, Landlords and the British Raj*, the lordly Rajput stratum split raggedly between 'loyalists' and 'rebels', with many hedging their bets until the last possible moment. Sometimes, though not always, British treatment of a particular estate or family in the immediate past explained the stance of individual magnates. Sometimes old conflicts with the Oudh or other rebel courts seems to have dictated their 'loyalty'. Again many were attracted to the cause of the Mughal or the King of Oudh, but helped individual British officers to escape and so insured themselves against the possibility of eventual British success.

The Rajput brotherhoods living close to the soil, and especially those communities inhabiting dry or poorly irrigated lands along the ravine-ridden banks of the great rivers or the dry tracts of the north-west, were more likely to revolt. They had suffered particularly badly from heavy British revenue demands since 1818 and as a result had lost great blocks of land rights in distress sales in

settlement of arrears of revenue. Isolated as they often were from the lines of communication which served exporters of cash crops, they had found little to admire in British rule. In his early writings on these embattled brotherhoods, Stokes tended to suggest that material loss was the cause of revolt. But later, imponderables such as loss of honour, the withdrawal of richer groups from ancient patterns of marriage alliance, or the destruction of traditional marks of rank and status by the ruthlessly utilitarian colonial government became more important in his analysis. Even so, one should stress that as far as pre-conditions were concerned, Stokes remained quite clear of the primacy of the material environment as the basic condition determining the incidence and nature of revolt. In his last two or three years of work, in fact, he increasingly stressed the role of ecology as the fundamental explanatory variable of Indian rural society. Caste, culture, 'mentalities' all seemed to him to refer back ultimately to the fickle agricultural environment of the north Indian plains. The great variety and divisions within the response of the caste groups, to which he had once attributed primacy, now seemed to derive more and more from the forms of production which underlay them. So Rajput and other village brotherhoods were predisposed to revolt because the 'thirsty' tracts in which they lived could not support a rapacious revenue demand. Similarly, pastoralist Gujars were more likely to revolt than their agriculturalist caste-fellows because expanding peasant agriculture fuelled by better communications and patchy advances in irrigation was cutting into their ancestral grazing grounds and tending to depress their social status. This analysis, now complete for Haryana and the upper Doab tracts (chapters 3 and 4), could easily have been extended to the eastwards. The *Gazetteers*, *Settlement Reports*, and *Narratives of Events* for the central and lower Doab districts (Kanpur, Mainpuri, Allahabad, and Fatehpur) fit the picture well. The revolt was fiercest in the poor, predominantly Rajput, communities that lived on the banks of the river Jumna or away from the Grand Trunk Road.[5] In general, the more secure landlords and tenants who had prospered through access to the road and the markets of the small towns along it remained quiet even when the British military presence was withdrawn.

[5] Village resettlements, Allahabad, NWP Revenue A Progs., May 1880, 29–40, IOL; *FSUP* iv. 651–66; Mutiny Rewards Bundle, Allahabad and Fatehpur Districts, Allahabad Commissioner's Office.

Here another element in Stokes's analysis fits into place. Although the role of personal commitment, of loyalty and honour was never denied, he did see a connection between a predisposition to help the Raj or acquiesce in its authority and the degree to which different elements in the magnate class had benefited from the export trades and limited commercialization which had come in alongside colonialism. Those among the gentry and aristocracy who had adapted better to commercial change and who had preserved their incomes even at the expense of loss of land rights tended to pit their dependants or scratch forces against the rebels. This was one condition which mapped out the wider geography of revolt. The British never really lost control of the Benares Division in the east or the Grand Trunk Road (a crucial military artery) because this new magnate category was more firmly established in the east and along the lines of communication. Civil rebellion was thus from the beginning a revolt of the hinterland; in the hinterland, it could survive long after the revolt of the sepoys, the cities, and riverain tracts had been suppressed. But by the same token it could only fitfully challenge the main artery of British power which lay between Delhi and Calcutta.

While the outline is firm, the nature of this new magnate element is less clear in the surviving writings. According to Stokes, this was a group of notables drawn in the main from the traditional (i.e. eighteenth-century) ruling groups, such as Rajputs, Bhumihar Brahmins, and Jats. He does not see it as a token of the rise of inferior social groups, though merchants such as Manik Chand of Phulpur in Allahabad and the Seths of Muttra, who raised armies to aid the British, were exceptions to this rule. (Manik Chand was unusual enough to receive the nickname of 'fighting *bania*' for his efforts in defence of the Phulpur treasury, while the Seths who helped supply and maintain the British at Agra were *nouveaux riches* who had prospered by British office-holding since the turn of the century.) In general, though, the new magnates were new by virtue of their capacity to adapt. They had kept close contacts with British revenue officers, had consolidated their holdings, or had simply happened to prosper because they had done well in the indigo, sugar, or opium booms which had passed temporarily across the plains since 1815. Most often, Stokes implies, the new magnates were efficient managers, who were unencumbered by ancient and well-established interests among the tenantry or had driven away

high-caste tenants in order to supplant them with more tractable dependants whose rents could be squeezed up. What these men were *not* were capitalist farmers; there is no implication that their production methods—as opposed to their methods of rental and revenue management—were novel, or that the basic family farm unit of peasant agriculture had been modified on their estates. It would be worth pointing out also that many of the new magnates who acted to protect British interests during the revolt had begun their rise to power before the onset of British rule as farmers of land revenue or military and administrative servants of pre-British regimes. In the Benares Division and in Allahabad, for instance, the British retained the support of the (predominantly Bhumihar Brahmin) magnates who had consolidated their power in the eighteenth century under the aegis of the Maharaja of Benares. These men had been entrepreneurs in revenue-farming and retained close connections with Indian merchants and moneylenders in Benares who had accumulated money in the sugar and cotton trades. The magnates did not, however, transform the agricultural methods of their domains and by the later nineteenth century they had become a stagnant weight on the impoverished agricultural economy of the eastern districts. In this region, by contrast, the Rebellion gained particular support from closely packed, high-caste communities of peasant landholders, such as the Monas Rajputs of the Bhadohi area.[6] These groups had progressively lost ground to the new magnates since the 1740s and were in no position to benefit either from British revenue courts or from the more integrated markets which colonial rule brought into being.

Eric Stokes stressed the role of the new magnate element because it was they alone who were able to protect British interests in a district when the sepoys had mutinied and the police disintegrated. And where powerful magnates did exist 'they were the effective decision-makers', for it was they who had the power to punish and subdue recalcitrant village communities or to provide artillery and some degree of military organization where interest or sentiment caused them to throw their weight behind the Rebellion. Where no such magnate element existed, groups of rebellious villages almost always tried to create an overarching structure of authority either by calling in the forces of one of the famous rebel leaders from a nearby area or by designating some local gentleman raja or viceroy

[6] *FSUP* iv. 169–229.

of the Delhi emperor. Some supra-village authority was crucial both for the British and for the successor regimes because without it no revenue could be collected. What Stokes never argued was that the rebellion itself was élitist in character or that larger magnates merely manipulated an inert peasant mass; only a superficial reading could suggest this. Even where a new magnate element existed, it was often nearly overwhelmed by autonomous revolt in the villages over the first few weeks of the revolt. In some cases, especially in Oudh, the pressure of village opinion seems to have pressed otherwise cautious magnates into revolt. And besides, over much of the countryside, no superior landed élite had come to exist or had survived the political changes of the late eighteenth century. The organization of civil rebellion thus often devolved on the village leadership of factions and extended kinship groups of the peasant landholders.

From his earliest essays through to the very title of this book, Stokes emphasized the fact that the Rebellion of 1857 was in a significant sense a peasant revolt. What he was not prepared to accept was that 'peasants' were universally a downtrodden mass whose interests ran wholly against those of north Indian landlords or that the Rebellion was a class revolt in any simple sense. 'Peasant' for him was not an emotive slogan but a sociological term which conveyed only part of the reality of the social situation of those who revolted in 1857. Both the petty landholders of Rajput and Bhumihar Brahmin caste and the Gujar petty cultivators and pastoralists who played such a forward part in different parts of the Provinces were, in a sense, peasants. But in status, function, and culture, there were enormous differences between them. In many situations, these segments of rural society found themselves on different sides in the revolt. In fact, the upper levels of the peasantry had some features which made them more akin to a debased gentry than to the classic peasant family farmer. The elaborate discussion of Rajput proprietary bodies in chapter 3 was designed to show that these peasant landholders had become cultivators only under the pressure of demographic expansion. This broke up their original rental holdings generation by generation, until they were forced to turn for livelihood to the profits of agriculture carried on either by their dependants, or in the final extremity by their own hands and those of their families. Their old political rights in the villages and their toehold in the revenue–rent structure were crucial not only for

additional income but because these were the features that actually distinguished them from the mass of peasant society. Similarly the role of members of many of these communities in the East India Company's Bengal Army was a flimsy guarantee of status and income drawn from outside the village. These were not peasant communities in a simple sense; true, they directed cultivation on tiny plots. But culturally their quasi-gentry status marked them off from the mass of the villagers.

Not only were many rural people who took part in the revolt in 1857 not peasants in the strict definition of the word, but peasants, like the bourgeoisie in the English Civil War, according to Tawney, fought on both sides. No general categorization into rich, middle, or poor throws light on the situation. While in the eastern districts, the 'peasantized' gentry of Rajput and Brahmin was a source of revolt, in Muzaffarnagar and Meerut to the west, one of the few areas where a recognizable rich peasantry had come into being before 1857, this stratum split on the lines of old factional alignments and of specific local differences in relative affluence which even contemporaries found hard to fathom. During the revolt, no rhetoric of land redistribution or cry for the modification of the rental system took hold, and social millenarian themes of entry into a promised age were very muted by comparison with near-contemporary events such as the Taiping Rebellion in China or the Java War. India in the early nineteenth century did throw up social movements directed specifically against the landowning structure, as witness the riots of 1859 in Bengal or the themes which emerged among the Muslim tenantry who participated in the Faraizi movement or the Moplah outbreaks in Malabar. As early as 1866, significant tension between the large magnates of Oudh and their tenants was reported in the very areas which threw up the Rebellion of 1857. But these were not major themes in the Rebellion itself. Peasants were prime movers in the disturbances in many places, but anti-landlordism or conflict with an emerging class of rich peasants hardly features in the evidence.

If 1857 was not a peasant rebellion in the sense of a rebellion for peasants as a class, how far was it a popular rebellion? Eric Stokes would also have found this characterization problematic. Individuals and groups certainly displayed fierce loyalty to the Mughal emperor and the King of Oudh. There was a widespread distrust of and dislike of the British, who were felt to be undermining religion,

both Hindu and Muslim. But all Stokes's researches in the Delhi area and western UP confirmed him in the view that the countryside did not 'rise up as one man'. Even in Rohilkhand and Farukhabad district, where there had been revulsion against the imposition of British rule and serious revolts in 1816 and 1817, the Mutiny broke down into a series of conflicts between town and country, artisan and merchant, Muslim gentry and Hindu landholder. In the immediate environs of Delhi where the influence of the Mughal empire might have been greatest, the imperial forces never established a liberated area, and revolt fragmented into factions which can best be related to differences in their material and political fate under Company rule.

Oudh, annexed only eighteen months before the rebellion, may have been a different case.[7] The lack of consideration of this region in Stokes's published works is one of the great lacunae, particularly in view of the interest afforded it by officials after the Rebellion and its later history of peasant militancy. His views on the rebellion in Oudh are set out in a paragraph or two in *The Peasant and the Raj* and they can be derived also from undergraduate papers he supervised. In general, he seems to have been in agreement with the arguments of Thomas R. Metcalf in chapter 7 of his *Land, Landlords and the British Raj*. The revolt, he may well have concluded, was certainly more popular and widespread in character in Oudh than it was further west. Over large areas of the country every village produced men who fought in the rebel armies. This was why the British advance towards Lucknow in the last few months of 1857 was so slow and painful. But in conceding that the revolt was popular in the sense of being very general, Stokes would have hesitated to give the impression that it was popular as opposed to 'élite', or that it was a unified patriotic or proto-nationalist upsurge. The villagers who opposed British arms house by house appear on closer examination to have been those same high-caste, village-controlling brotherhoods whose privileges had been threatened by the changes in the Bengal army to which they flocked in large numbers before 1856. If there is evidence that the great magnates were often pushed into revolt by their following, the following in question appears to have been not the ordinary tenant or the low castes so much as the embattled yeoman of the big villages.

[7] R. Mukherjee, 'The rebellion in Awadh, 1857–8. A study in popular resistance', unpubl. D. Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1980.

Revolt in Oudh was nearly as particularist in character and as localized in form as it was elsewhere. The difference is that the British occupation was brutal and sudden here, whereas in the North-Western Provinces older structures of authority and potential centres of revolt had been slowly eroded, while a class of new magnates, more committed to colonial rule, had emerged. In southern Oudh, the village proprietors were enlisted in revolt by their sepoy brethren and by the effects of the Temporary Revenue Settlement of Martin Gubbins which required them to remit revenue to government when they had neither the resources nor the social power to do so. Around Lucknow and its Muslim small-town satellites, the insult to the Court of Oudh and its banishment to Calcutta alongside the disbanding of the King's 60,000 strong army bred fierce resentment. In the semi-cultivated areas of northern Oudh, different grievances rankled. The old magnates resented the loss of their fortresses and political rights which they had guarded jealously against the intervention of the Lucknow authorities. But their response was circumspect. Many held off from revolt until the summer months were nearly over and there seemed some chance that the British might lose. Others only reacted *after* British armies had invaded Oudh and the force of the colonial state appeared for the first time near their domains. Many made pragmatic local settlements with the victorious colonial regime, disarming their peasant supporters as efficiently as they had drawn them into revolt months earlier. For none of these elements was material deprivation unimportant, yet for none of them was it merely a question of economic loss. The payment of tribute to the sovereign was a token of allegiance, just as the building of a fortress was a mark of status and independence. It is wholly anachronistic to argue that Metcalf or Stokes are too 'economistic' in their approach to the causes of revolt.[8] Contemporaries would not have been able to make a distinction between the 'ideological' and the 'economic': for a king needed wealth to display his glory, while a trooper needed employment to maintain his family and his commitment to true religion.

A finished manuscript of *The Peasant Armed* might also have turned to the question of popular revolt in the towns, and in particular, to

[8] As for instance, G. Pandey, 'A view of the observable: a positivist "understanding" of agrarian society and political protest in colonial India', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vii. 3 (Apr. 1980). Also R. Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (New Delhi, 1983).

the role of Islam. Initially, Eric Stokes affected a humorous disdain for the 'city slickers' among his colleagues who refused to get village mud on their academic boots. There were no more than a few references, for instance, to what the British called 'the low Muhammadan rabble' which was an active element of revolt in towns such as Koil (Aligarh). But in time the towns as seats of rebellion, or centres of the commercial classes who supplied the British with grain and money, bulked larger in his work. As chapter 1 shows, urban rebellion in the west of the region seems to have been an important link between the military Mutiny and peasant revolt. The British commander failed to follow up the sepoys on the road to Delhi after the first outbreak at Meerut because he was wrong-footed by urban mobs composed of so-called criminal tribes and discontented artisans who attacked the civil lines and cantonments, putting the European population in jeopardy. This happened elsewhere, so that the difficulty of keeping an eye on mutinous sepoys as well as hostile city crowds cramped the British military response and allowed revolt to take fire in the countryside.

In many centres artisans and in particular Muslim weavers, took a leading part in revolt and pillage, though not necessarily on the rebel 'side'. Some of these weaving communities were influenced by the teachings of Muslim purist movements and especially the erroneously named 'Wahhabis' who followed the preachings of Sayyid Ahmed of Rai Bareilly, instigator of a revolt against the Sikhs on the north-west frontier in the 1820s. Here we encounter one major gap in Stokes's account of 1857. Nowhere is there a sustained account of its ideological dimension, either at the élite or at the popular level. But it is clear that he was well aware of this dimension. Undergraduates reading his Cambridge special subject on the Rebellion wrote essays for him on the role of Islam and the ideology of the rebels. As early as 1968 his reading lists contained F. W. Buckler's essay of 1922 on 'The political theory of the Indian Mutiny'.[9] Buckler contended that in Muslim law it was the British not the Indians who were in revolt. For the British had recognized the sovereignty of the Mughal emperor in various court rituals and were in theory still no more than the revenue collectors of Bengal, a position which they had occupied since 1765. Moreover, the British were schismatics since the Mughal was not merely a secular ruler,

[9] F. W. Buckler, 'The political theory of the Indian Mutiny', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th series, v (1922).

but regent of God on earth (*Khalifa*). When in 1848 the British refused to present ceremonial gifts to the Emperor they were repudiating this allegiance, a crime which they followed in 1856 with the usurpation of the lands of the Mughal's viceroy, the Vazir of Oudh. Bernard S. Cohn has recently incoporated Buckler's insight into his argument about the importance of ideology and kingship in the construction of the Indian social order.[10] Before establishing the Crown as the centre of Indian political life in 1858, he argues, the British were constrained to 'desacralize' the royal centre of Delhi and humiliate the Emperor with trial and deportation.

Buckler's argument cannot be dismissed, as his Anglo-Indian critics of 1922 tried to do, by arguing that Mughal authority had been dismantled in practice. His point is about theory and ideology and as such is an interesting and valid one. Some leading figures in the revolt did respond (as Stokes showed) to appeals from the Emperor, or used his authority to raise armed forces against the British. The plight of their sovereign and of the King of Oudh does appear to have impressed the wider populace. Sepoys converged on Delhi, for instance, when their best strategy would probably have been to spread the revolt outward as fast as possible. Instead they pressed in on the capital because they could only conceive the validity of their action in terms of Mughal authority. But the notion of imperial legitimacy is only of limited use in understanding the events of 1857. The influence of Lucknow or Delhi seems weak by comparison with the political obligations and economic interests generated within the little kingdoms of the localities. Many magnates like the Jat rajas near Delhi offered homage to the Emperor, but secretly communicated with the British forces encamped on the Delhi Ridge. The Jat position was, after all, historically ambiguous. Their rise to power in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had been as 'plunderers and rebels' who preyed on imperial lines of communication. An assertion of Mughal sovereignty would always have been a double-edged weapon.

Much the same can be said of the Islamic dimension. There is no doubt that a large body of Muslim learned men and members of the sufi mystical orders (especially Chishti Sabris and Naqshbandis)[11]

[10] B. S. Cohn, 'Representing authority in Victorian India', in E. J. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

[11] F. A. Nizami, 'Saints, scholars and shrines. North Indian Muslims and colonial rule, 1800–60', unpubl. D. Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1982.

participated in a revolt which they saw as a defence of their faith. Muslim fighters staged heroic attacks on the British on the Ridge, while the *maulavis* of Allahabad and Faizabad were among the most popular leaders of revolt, drawing a strong response from artisans and petty landholders in some areas. But there were many reasons why the 1857 rebellion did not become a holy war, a *jihad* such as spread through contemporary western China or Africa. First, the learned were divided on the theological justification for holy war. Some argued that this was a secular revolt since the British had refrained from interference with Islam; others that since a key requirement of *jihad* was that it should be successful, and success was far from certain, a holy war would be illegitimate. There were in addition conflicts between various Islamic sects as to the proper leadership of such a campaign and concern, at least among the Delhi leaders, about the likely response of the Hindus. The social structure of Indian Islam was another important reason for the uncoordinated nature of the Muslim response. The great religious authorities were closely tied up with the Muslim landed classes. Muslims had lost land rights, and some revenue-free grants to religious institutions had been sequestrated by the British in the 1830s and 1840s. But their plight was nothing like as bad as post-Mutiny commentators such as W. W. Hunter thought. Indeed, many of the religious men were members of Muslim families which had made a relatively successful adaptation to the conditions of British rule. Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, later founder of the Aligarh Anglo-Oriental College, was one celebrated example. Stokes's narrative in chapters 3 and 4 makes it clear that it was the economic and political ties of members of Muslim learned families which inhibited their response to cries for holy war. Only in the vicinity of Thana Bhawan north of Delhi did the poverty of the petty gentry and a strong ideological impulse from local religious leaders of Naqshbandi sufi affiliation forge a truly Islamic response.

Yet if Stokes continued to doubt that appeals to any broad ideology overrode the particularistic loyalties and interests of the localities, he came increasingly to emphasize the importance of the contingent events of military action in his account of the incidence and spread of revolt. These factors could not simply be deduced from consideration of social and economic structures. A strong counter-attack from the 'history of events'—of narrative and personalities—which has long been rumoured along the networks of

professional historians was already well established in his work. Not only was the broad area within which revolt occurred delineated by the disposition of European British troops and Sikhs, Madrasis, and Gurkhas who showed no propensity to mutiny, but the spread of civil revolt within Hindustan was often determined by the actions of individual British officers. It is difficult of course to separate purely military considerations from social ones. Ultimately the failure of the Indian troops to take the British head on with bayonet charges against fixed positions reflected their inability to throw up an officer corps to replace the Europeans. On the other hand, the slow progress of the British through Oudh reflected the stubborn opposition of village *zamindars* and sepoys who were adept at sharpshooting guerrilla warfare. In the first two chapters and in the introduction, which were virtually the last sections to be written, the human drama and the mythology of the revolt, carefully excluded from the chapters of social history, reappear with drive and conviction.

The contingent, almost accidental features of the revolt also help to explain the puzzle of its timing in relation to the longer-term trends in north Indian history which Stokes touched on elsewhere. Thus the Rebellion of 1857 does not seem to have reflected any 'conjunctural crisis' similar to those posited by French historians of the *Annales* school as arising from convergences in trends of prices, wages, and agricultural production. By 1857 the economy of the Ganges valley was evidently pulling out of the severe price depression of the 1830s and early 1840s, yet no sustained pattern of growth had emerged. Of course some local pressures generated by the expansion of the arable had been released in the west of the region where the herdsmen communities were coming up against pioneer peasant agriculture. It can also be argued that in a period of rising prices and greater activity, precariously based groups such as the high-caste brotherhood communities of Oudh and Benares were likely to come under greater pressure as their aversion to direct agricultural management put them at a disadvantage. But it is difficult to perceive any general trend of increased social tension in the years immediately preceding the Rebellion. Revolt and turbulence were endemic in Indian rural society, both before and after the colonial invasion, and if there was a period of more general tension, it was during the 1830s, not the 1850s. Perhaps indeed it was the very uneven pace of agrarian change, the very lack of strong general

trends, which explains the fragmented and contradictory response of different sections of rural society to the crumbling of British military power in the summer of 1857.

Eric Stokes was similarly cautious about claiming too much for the Revolt. Its importance to him was that it revealed momentarily the structure of Indian rural society, not that it proved a universal and decisive turning-point in the history of British India. True, the legends of bravery and massacre informed the stiff manner of Victorian Anglo-India and were later surreptitiously introduced into the ideology of Indian nationalism. The delegates to the first Indian National Congress ritually denounced the revolt as reactionary, but by the time of the 'extremist' movement of 1905–10, images of the rebellious Rani of Jhansi were being drawn in procession on floats during the Ramlila festival in north Indian cities. On the other hand, the British swing to the landlords after 1857 can be exaggerated, while the agrarian histories of Bengal, Bombay, and Madras were hardly influenced by events in north India. Curiously, the experience of the Mutiny did not assume importance in any of Stokes's more extended writings on Indian history; here transport, prices, and population were the real actors. The rebellion was a brief marvel, a freak wave which suddenly revealed the depths of the ocean, not a flood tide. Like 1848 in Europe or the Taiping Rebellion in China, it was 'without issue'.

In sum Eric Stokes's analysis of the Revolt of 1857 seemed to be charting not a single explanatory variable, but a hierarchy of conditions. At the bottom was ecology which represented the *longue durée* of Indian agrarian history; above this clustered a whole range of social and economic forces which determined the propensity to revolt. But it was the specific decisions of British officers and Indian leaders which helped translate those propensities into historical action.

The Peasant Armed is incomplete and Stokes's overall arguments can only be fleetingly glimpsed in *The Peasant and the Raj*. But it is already clear that together they represent a major historical revision, and one which is typical of the work of British historians in the 1960s and 1970s. In its close empirical study of the conditions of agrarian society and its dense reasoning on the relationship between social pre-conditions and political action, the book is reminiscent of recent work on the English Civil War and English-language writing on the French Revolution. In all these cases, the

discovery of complexity and paradox had the wider purpose of warning against the danger of monolithic or dogmatic constructions of the past. Eric Stokes was, of course, a consummate expounder of theory, as the *English Utilitarians* and occasional essays on imperialism showed. But where others have seen the poverty of theory, Stokes saw danger in its luxury. Stokes felt that history was generally 'a harmless pursuit' from which few general conclusions could emerge, as he once told an undergraduate historical society. His own view of political and social priorities derived not from historical theory but from a notion of natural law and from revealed religion. But it was important for him that the historian should refrain from suppressing the specific, personal, and paradoxical in the interests of constructing some overarching argument or ideology. Otherwise this harmless jester might find itself serving at the court of more fearsome monarchs.

There was another reason why Eric Stokes persisted with the detailed analysis represented by the later chapters of this book. He had a vivid sense of the continuity of historical scholarship over long periods of time. Often he seemed as fascinated by the minds and investigations of Victorian officials, or the debates of Indian historians of the 1950s, as he was by the events of the Rebellion themselves. He felt that historical craftsmanship and the creation of a solid factual base made it possible for works to survive over time, even when the motives and ideologies of a particular generation of historians had been exploded or rendered redundant. He would have been happy with the thought that his own investigations of 1857 will be the necessary starting-point for all future historians of the Indian Mutiny, regardless of their nationality or ideological predilections.

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